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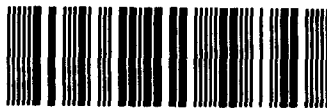
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LEARNING FOR WORK: SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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Doctor of Education (Ed.D)

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Glossary

Child and Youth Work - Although focusing on children, youth and their families and thus not as broad as social care in Ireland there are similarities between child and youth work in North America and social care work with young people in Ireland. More details are available at <http://cyc-net.org/profession/pro-definitions.html>

Garda/Guard/Gardai – refers to member(s) of the Irish police force, An Garda Síochána (Guardians of the Peace).

Health Services Employers Agency (HSEA) – The national body responsible for recruitment within the health services in Ireland. (www.hsea.ie).

Health Service Executive (HSE) - The national body responsible for health and personal social services in Ireland.

Health Board - Prior to the establishment of the Health Services Executive in 2004 health services in Ireland were delivered by a structure of regional health boards.

Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) - The body which awards qualifications to Higher Education Institutions not including the universities nor the Dublin Institute of Technology. (www.hetac.ie). It replaced the NCEA (National Council for Educational Awards) in June 2001.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) - The Higher Education Authority is the planning, policy development and advisory body for higher education in Ireland. In addition it is the funding authority. (www.heai.ie).

IASCW – Irish Association of Social Care Workers. Originally called the Irish Association for Care Workers the IASCW is the representative body for social care practitioners in Ireland. (www.iascw.ie).

IMPACT - the trade union which represents many social care practitioners.
(www.impact.ie).

Inter cert. [Intermediate Certificate] – Now called the Junior Certificate this is the State examination that children take after the first three years or junior cycle of secondary school at age 15 or 16 years. Children normally take between nine and eleven subjects at this examination.

Leaving cert. [Certificate] – The State examination taken at the end of secondary school (after 5 or 6 years). A subject taken at honours level is equivalent to two thirds of the workload of an A Level. Young people normally take seven or eight subjects at this examination, normally including Mathematics, English, Irish and another language. Grades in the best six subjects are calculated for entry points to higher education.

Leaving Certificate Applied - The Leaving Certificate Applied is offered in some schools in Ireland as an alternative to the more academically orientated Leaving Certificate Established. It is designed for students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the Leaving Certificate Established or who choose not to opt for it. The Programme is administered and assessed by the State Examinations Commission as is the Leaving Certificate Established. See <http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=ca&sc=sd> for more details.

NCEA (National Council for Educational Awards) – Awarding body for higher level qualifications apart from the universities and Dublin Institute of Technology prior to June 2001, when it was replaced by HETAC.

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification.

Resident Managers' Association (RMA) - The representative association of managers of care services in Ireland.

SNVQ – Scottish National Vocational Qualification.

Social Educator – The equivalent profession to social care practice in parts of mainland Europe.

Social Pedagogue – The equivalent profession to social care practice in parts of mainland Europe.

Social Services Inspectorate - The Social Services Inspectorate is empowered by the Child Care Act (1991) to inspect and report on residential centres for children operated by the Regional Health Authorities in Ireland (Ireland is divided into eight health authority areas. The Eastern Region Health Authority is sub-divided into five areas). The Health Act (2007) expanded the role of the Inspectorate to include other areas of social care such as residential services for older people, people with an intellectual or physical disability and children's detention centres, previously administered by the Department of Education and Science. The SSI was administered by the Department of Health and Children until May 2007 when was established on a statutory basis as the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services within the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). The SSI produces Inspection Reports of centres and Annual Reports and has done so since 2001. (For further details see http://www.hiqa.ie/functions_ssi.asp).

Abstract

The aims of this study were twofold. The first was to explore how social care practitioners undertaking a degree course to obtain the required professional qualification interpret the roles of student and social care practitioner and how structural factors particularly in the college environment impact on these interpretations. The second aim was to examine the development and change in the social identities of student and social care practitioner. The theoretical framework used to explore identity is that of structural symbolic interactionism as it provides a structure in which stability and change in identity, as well as the influence of social context can be examined. Congruent with the aims of the study and the theoretical framework a qualitative methodology is used. Data was mainly collected using a series of semi-structured interviews but supplemented through participant observation, questionnaires and diaries. Fifteen participants were involved and interviewed three times throughout their first academic year. Nine participants were interviewed again at the end of their second academic year. Commonality was found in the interpretations of the roles of social care practitioner and student, agreeing with existing literature. However variation was found among participants in the integration between and bi-directional impact of the two social identities suggesting that work-related learning is affected individual and social factors. Recommendations for the professional education of social care workers are made.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview of Chapter

This chapter introduces the reader to the societal and institutional context of the research as well as the theoretical framework used to explore identity. To understand the perspective of the researcher and her impact on the data generated this introductory chapter begins with an explanation of the rationale for the research.

As the societal discourses of education in a country impact on available interpretations of the role of the student, an outline of the educational policies and consequent view of third level education in Ireland is necessary. To situate the role and identity of the social care practitioner, an outline of the history of social care work and the current process of professionalisation is then given. Before discussing the development of the research questions the institutional context in which the study is described. This is followed by a discussion of the main concepts and debates in the symbolic interactionist perspective. The chapter concludes with an overview of the content of each chapter.

Rationale

My reasons for choosing the particular topic of research were twofold. Firstly, I was curious to explore the education of social care practitioners, in which I was involved. Secondly, I had a desire to increase my own professional knowledge of students' interpretations and experiences of being students in order to facilitate my own teaching and put in place appropriate support structures.

Over the last eight years of teaching social care practitioners I have observed some changes in the attitudes and motivations of practitioner social care students. Increasing pressure

from the Health Service Executive¹ for social care practitioners to gain an accredited professional qualification has resulted in more varied and sometimes conflicting motivations amongst students. My experience has been in line with that of Illeris (2003, p.14), who found that “most adults approach education in very ambivalent ways” motivated by both personal and occupational reasons “but also fear being humiliated or challenged above the level of their personal thresholds”.

While in-service courses in social care practice have been in existence in academic institutions in Ireland since 1971 (Richardson, 1996), and recommendations for training of unqualified staff, at least in residential childcare, have been made since the publication of the *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report* in 1970, the forthcoming introduction of registration (Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005) means that new and existing practitioners must attain an accredited qualification. Pre-service training in social care practice began in the mid-1980s (Gallagher and O’Toole, 1999) and is now available in twelve educational institutions across the country. In April 2001, the then Minister for Children announced concern over practitioners not holding relevant qualifications and salary scales of new social care workers in the areas of residential child care and intellectual disability were tied to the possession of qualifications (Hanafin, 2001).

I have also lectured in another third-level institution to part-time adult students who are obliged to obtain a minimum qualification of Advanced Certificate² for their occupations in adult basic education. This exposure to various forms of adult education and adult students increased my curiosity to explore the experiences of students whose participation is obligatory, particularly as this can be seen as contrary to some theories and policies on adult education where adult education is portrayed as a voluntary activity (Illeris, 2003, p.14). However Lea and West (1995) point out that the primacy of vocational goals does not exclude personal issues for students in adult education and Blair *et al.* (1995) suggest participation itself can change motivation and goals. This suggests inter- and intra-variation

¹ The Health Services Executive is the national body responsible for health and personal social services in Ireland.

² An Advanced Certificate is at Level 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications, a level below that of a B.A. (Ord.), which participants in my study were doing. See www.nqai.ie for more details.

with regard to the goals and orientations of students indicating the importance of exploring this as learners' intentions can influence the way they approach and process the learning experience (Boud *et al.*, 1985) and evaluate it (Walters, 2000), which in turn impact on teaching.

McLeod (2001) points out the weaknesses of reliance on a common sense understanding of the world for professionals as common sense knowledge can be changeable, incoherent, disjointed and conflicting. Therefore conducting this research should provide a research basis from which greater personal and professional understanding of students' perspectives can be achieved. Having lectured in various tertiary institutions since 1986 the dangers of becoming complacent to students' perspectives is real. Thus another motivation to conduct this research and an outcome of it is that it provides an opportunity, separate from the day-to-day work as a lecturer, to "hear the stories of real people" and thereby "understand, respect and respond to the ends that are important to them" (Rossiter, 1999, p.67).

Having outlined the rationale some background is needed on educational policies and third-level education in Ireland and on social care work in Ireland before discussion of the aims of research and development of research questions. Pertinent aspects of the symbolic interactionist framework used to explore roles and identities in this research are then described.

Educational Policies and Third Level Education in Ireland

Ireland in the first decade of the 21st century is a country where education is valued, particularly for its contribution to economic growth, regardless of how contested the relationship is between the Celtic Tiger and investment in education (Dunne, 2002; Share *et al.*, 2007). Heraty *et al.* (2000) point out that an increasing number of occupations in Ireland are becoming qualification driven. Dunne (2002, p.69) links the commencement of view that education has the function of "promoting the kinds of knowledge and talent that would create a skilled workforce" to the industrialisation policy of the 1960s. There was a consequent marked increase in the numbers attending second level education from 1965 and increased participation in third level education since the mid 1980s (Collins, 2000).

Statistics show increases in the educational attainment of the population with 81% having completed secondary education or higher among the 25 to 34 years age bracket compared to 40% of the 55 to 64 years age bracket in 2005 (OECD, 2007). The admission rate of new entrants to institutions of higher education in Ireland has increased from 0.20 to 0.55³ between 1980 and 2004 (O'Connell *et al.*, 2006).

Inequalities in participation in third-level education with regard to social class have been noted (Clancy, 1995; Clancy and Wall, 2000) and a subsequent interest in broadening participation evident. Dunne (2002) identifies equity as a more recent theme of Irish policy documents with an emphasis on education as providing 'life chances' to individuals. Reports and policies show concern with encouraging both young people living in social disadvantage and mature students to participate in higher education. For example in 2000 the Department of Education and Science launched an action group to increase access to third level education for individuals with disabilities, individuals from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and mature 'second chance' students. The Higher Education Authority launched an action plan to achieve equity of access to higher education in 2004.

Compared to other countries, there is a poor participation rate of mature students in Irish higher education. The government is actively encouraging greater participation (see Hanafin, 2005 for example) and it is increasing. The proportion of mature entrants in universities was 9% in 2004/2005 compared to 6.9% in 1988/1989 (Higher Education Authority, 2006). In the Institutes of Technology⁴ the figure is higher with an estimate of 30% of the full-time and part-time students aged over twenty-three years in 2003/2004 (Douglas, 2004). A concern with increasing the rate of mature student participation in education for economic reasons is evident in policy documents (for example Department of Education and Science, 1998; 2003; Collins 2000; Skilbeck, 2001). Concomitantly an

³ "The admission rate to higher education is the flow of new entrants to higher education expressed as a ratio to the number of persons in the population of the single years of age from which more the 75 percent of the new entrants come." (O'Connell *et al.*, 2006 p.314)

⁴ The higher education system in Ireland traditionally consists of three sectors, the universities, the technological sector (Institutes of Technology) and colleges of education. The Institutes of Technology have been reported to be viewed by the public as inferior to the universities (Gallagher and O'Toole, 1999; Share and McElwee, 2005).

increasing number of occupations in Ireland have become qualification driven (Heraty *et al.* 2000).

The focus on education for economic reasons is reported in the policies of other European countries. Boshier (1998) proposes that lifelong learning has been transformed by the European Union as a way of enhancing economic effectiveness and reducing unemployment, with a concomitant focus on individual responsibility in learning skills necessary for improved economic advantage. In accord with Boshier's analysis, Griffin's (1998) examination of the rhetoric in European policy documents emphasises individual moral responsibility in participating in education. However Alheit and Merrill's (2001, n.p.) analysis of educational biographies of students in Germany, the U.K. and Ireland indicate different motivations for participating in higher education, with Irish students being categorised as 'careerists' who "enter university for prestige or financial reasons" and are "extrinsically motivated" viewing "academic studies as an instrument to reach a goal or earn more money".

Despite the drive to increase mature student participation barriers still persist, for example Collins (2000) notes rigidity in entry requirements, inadequate funding, course structure and credit transfer, lack of access courses and traditional teaching and assessment methods as preventative. Studies of mature students who are participating indicate dissatisfaction with teaching methods and student involvement and feelings of not belonging because of their age (e.g. Lynch, 1997; Inglis and Murphy, 1999).

While participation in higher education is being actively encouraged by government policies in Ireland the underlying intention appears to be related to economic reasons, a position taken up by Irish students as suggested by Alheit and Merrill's (2001) research. As a clear link exists between career and educational participation for the participants in this study there is an expectation that this view of education will be prevalent among participants. Hence one of the research questions focuses on the interaction between professional identity and student identity.

Social Care Work in Ireland

Origin and Status of Social Care Work

According to Gilligan (1991) the social care system in Ireland originated in the Poor Law system while Ireland was under British administration. Until the middle of the 19th century children considered to be neglected or abandoned were put in workhouses with adults. Boarding-out children began as a response to concern about the impact of the workhouse environment on children. This Gilligan (1991) sees as the precursor to fostering. Voluntary care was also provided by religious institutions and charities for juvenile offenders. When the English Reformatory Schools (Youthful Offenders) Act (1854) was extended to Ireland in 1858 some of these existing institutions were certified and thus funded and inspected. These institutions provided for young offenders committed by the courts. Ten years later Industrial Schools were established to cater for neglected, orphaned and abandoned children. Industrial Schools were managed and run by religious orders due to the refusal of local authorities to maintain them. In 1924 administration of the reformatory and industrial school was placed with the Minister for Education (*Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report*, 1970).

Gilligan (1991) and Smith (2003) argue that the childcare system in Ireland and England was based on a traditional medical model in which the child's problems were seen as stemming from either innate defects or a bad family environment, ignoring the role of social structural factors. The emphasis was on "the diagnosis of moral failings" (Smith, 2003, p.237). These were viewed as being best treated by the removal of the child into a better environment separated from the negative influence of parents. Gilligan contends that the child care system acted as a form of social control in that it "sanctioned failing parents [...] served as a warning to others [...] and acted quite openly as a means of transmitting new social and cultural values" to children living in deprived social conditions (1991, p.195).

Hence, historically in Ireland, as in other countries, the recipients of social care services are low status members of society. An association between a public view of low status of an occupation and low status clients has been made (Matheson, 2000). In contrast, in mainland Europe where the status of social pedagogy is higher than that of social care and youth work in other countries and professional status is well established, its origin is traced by Davies-Jones (2000, n.p.) as being a response to helping people deal with societal change and consequent social problems, initially after the “rapid industrialisation in the nineteenth century” and later after World War II, rather than dealing with perceived individual failings.

While the origins of social care work are in residential child care in Ireland it has expanded beyond this sector⁵, which results in further confusion for both members of the profession and the general public in understanding the nature and function of the work (Gibelman, 1999).

Other factors identified to contribute to poor understanding and the low status of social care work are the well-documented cases of abuse and the association with parenting. The association with parenting, particularly mothering, consequent devaluing of skills, and failure to appreciate the complexity of the work, as contributing to low status is documented, particularly in residential care (Smith, 2005). Lane (2001, n.p.) notes that until the view that bringing up children changes from being “something which any amateur can do, it will have low status, whether in academic circles or in terms of recruitment and pay for the workers”.

The influential *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report* (1970, p.13) on the one hand, cites Dinnage and Kellmer-Pringle (1967) in opposing the view that social care is the same as mothering, describing it as “an unrealistic and misleading over-simplification”, but yet recommends that residential units should be “run by houseparents or, where this is not

⁵ Social care workers are employed in services for individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism, sensory impairments, mental health services, youth work, drug prevention education in the community, day and residential care for the older person and the homeless, although the majority work with children and youth in community and secure residential settings (Hallstedt and Högström, 2005).

feasible, by a housemother”, albeit a trained housemother. Furthermore the report advocates that the primary duty of care lies with the housemother while the “housefather should go out to work in the usual way” (p.16). Cancedda (2001, p.47) suggests a relationship between possession of qualifications and rejection of the belief that caring is based on “maternal instinct” in childcare services. However a study involving representatives of stakeholders in the Irish social care system, reports that one of the participants, a social care educator, attributed the skill base of social care as “being similar to that of a mother” (Gallagher and O’Toole, 1999, p.77). Thus even within social care education there is a danger of devaluation of the work.

As well as the perception of social care work being affected by its historical origins and the low status of the client group the public standing of social care work is reported to be impacted on by reports of abuse in care settings and associating its skill base with another low status occupation, that of parenting. While Cancedda (2001) suggests that caring professions will improve their status when workers possess recognised educational qualifications, as will be discussed in the next section, this and the process of professionalisation of social care is marred by inconsistencies.

Professionalisation of Social Care

The process of professionalisation is described as “a deliberate action on the part of occupational members” (Matheson, 2000, p.64) due to discontent with the current position of an occupation, and consequently a desire to improve it (Friedson, 1990). Research in Irish social care, (e.g. Norton, 1999; Williams and Lalor, 2000) shows that social care practitioners express discontent with status, public and inter-professional perception, pay and conditions of work. Writers from the U.K. and North America (e.g. Milligan, 1998; 2003; Heron and Chakrabarti, 2002a; 2002b; Charles *et al.*, 2005; Colton and Roberts, 2007) express similar views. The same level of dissatisfaction is not apparent in many mainland European countries, perhaps, as Ward (1999) notes, social care practitioners there are recognised as a distinct profession, suggesting that public recognition of professional status enhances professional identity.

The professionalisation of an occupation involves the state, educational institutions and representative bodies (Hallstedt and Högström, 2005). With social care in Ireland, as Gallagher and O'Toole (1999, p.83) note, the process of professionalisation has been characterised by "a lack of internal unity", differing levels of qualification, diversity in practice settings and "exclusion from key policy making structures with the bureaucratic professional hierarchy of state welfare services."

There is also disagreement with regard to the instigation of the professionalisation process for social care work, with Gallagher and O'Toole suggesting that the development of the first social care training course in Ireland in 1971 signalled the beginning, but Courtney (2003) and Farrelly and O'Doherty (2005) tracing it to the foundation of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI)⁶ in 1999. With regard to professional training the *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report* (1970) emphasised the training of staff in the context of professional competence. Three of the thirteen recommendations of the Report refer to the necessity of having staff "fully trained in the aspects of Child Care" (p.6). The report also suggests that the "provision of trained staff should take precedence over any other recommendation" (p.14) and that "both the attitudes and professional competence of those responsible for children in care are important" (p.18). Recommendations for training to improve the quality of care for clients and the position of workers have been made continuously since 1970 (for example CARE, 1972; Task Force on Child Care Services, 1980; NCEA, 1992; Williams and Lalor, 2000). Since 2001 the salary scales of new social care practitioners in the areas of residential child care and intellectual disability are tied to the possession of qualifications (Hanafin, 2001). Although the Health and Social Care Professionals Act was enacted in October 2005 registration boards for social care practitioners, agreement about recognised educational qualifications and thus legal recognition of their professional status is still awaited. This uncertainty can impact on the professional identity of social care practitioners through public and inter-professional perceptions. In particular, the lack of definite agreement about recognised qualifications impacts on decisions to engage with courses of education.

⁶ The Social Services Inspectorate was set up to inspect and register residential services for children in need of care and protection. In May 2007 the SSI was integrated into the Health Information and Quality Authority and its range of duties broadened. See hiqua.ie for more details.

As mentioned above, in-service courses in social care practice are in existence in Ireland since 1971 (Richardson, 1996). However, in 2003 about 45% of social care practitioners do not hold the basic educational qualification (Clarke, 2003). Examination of the available Annual Reports of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), from 2001 until 2004 reveals that there is not a consistent increase in qualified staff. Later SSI inspection reports of individual units do not mention qualifications, though training to cope with the behaviour of clients is referred to.

While the SSI, up to 2004, consistently refer to a Diploma/B.A.⁷ in Social Care/Applied Social Studies as the qualification for social care practitioners and make recommendations to the health authorities regarding qualification of staff, Farrelly and O'Doherty (2005, p.82) report a "lack of uniformity of the qualifications required" in advertisements for positions in social care, with some stating that "unspecified childcare qualifications are merely desirable or something similarly ambiguous", reflecting inconsistencies in the attitudes of the services providers towards what is required.

The slow and uncertain process of professionalisation of social care with inconsistency regarding the requirement and thus value of educational qualifications not only impacts on engagement with education but also the professional identity of the social care practitioner as this is formed from the role of the social care practitioner within the context of the available social structures (Stets and Burke, 2000). The cost of professionalisation, particularly with regard to education, is another factor to be considered. In Ireland, while there has been voiced concern regarding disruption to services by releasing staff for some time (Gallagher and O'Toole, 1999) this has become a reality for more and more practitioners. This has manifested itself in course design with reductions in time spent in college, fewer employers contributing towards college fees and paid study leave.

⁷ After the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland the award of Diploma become the award of B.A (Ordinary Level). In terms of knowledge, competence, know-how and skill the award of Diploma and B.A. (Ordinary Level) are the same, both being Level 7 on the 10 stage framework. A B.A. (Hons) is at Level 8 (See www.nqai.ie)

The Institutional Context

At the time this study was conducted social care education was provided in twelve Institutes of Technology across Ireland. Some institutes also run courses on a part-time basis for existing practitioners. The location for this study was in one of these institutes, located in Dublin, which has provided both full-time and part-time social care education for over twenty years. Due to the age and size of the establishment schools and departments are spread throughout a number of buildings in the city centre. Thus, because there is no central campus students do not get an opportunity to interact with students from other departments and schools. In addition the participants in this study attend classes in college for one day a week which again limited their time to interact with other students and staff, affecting the student identity formed.

Also increasing pressure from the Eastern Regional Health Authority⁸ to provide training with the minimum of disruption to agencies led to redesigning the course, in particular changing the presentation format from attendance at college for two days a week to one day a week. The participants in this study are drawn from the first cohort of students to experience the single day format.

Aims of the Research and Development of Research Questions

I initially set out to explore the construction of identity and sources of support in a group of adult students undertaking a degree course to obtain the basic qualification, a B.A. (Ord.) in Social Care Practice, required for their occupation as social care practitioners. However exploration and identification of a theoretical framework for the concept of identity made it clear that this required refining. The choice of structural symbolic interactionism as a theoretical model for identity, in which the self is conceptualised as an assortment of identities each “associated with particular interactional settings or roles” (Burke and Tully, 1977, p.883) necessitated treating identity as a multifaceted concept. The theoretical framework will be discussed in more detail in the next section. This led to the decision to

⁸ The Eastern Regional Health Authority oversees and reports to the Health Service Executive See McWilliams (2004) ‘Social Care Education and Training Project’. Presentation to the 4th Annual IASCE Conference, Athlone, October 2004. Available at: <http://staffweb.itsligo.ie/staff/pshare/IASCE/worbased.ppt>

focus on the two social identities, that of student and social care practitioner, although the interaction with other social identities is not overlooked.

Thus the research questions became:

- How do participants interpret the role of student through the course of their degree and what features are important in their student identity?
- How do participants interpret the role of the social care practitioner and what features are important in their professional identity?
- How do participants interpret the notion of support and how does support impact on their student and professional identities?
- How do these social identities interact in the context of studying for a professional qualification?

These questions were further refined as the study progressed, in particular support became subsumed with structural factors affecting the development and change in student and professional identities, fitting more coherently with the theoretical framework, which explicitly links social structures to the construction of identities (Howard, 2000). Both the aim and research questions therefore changed throughout the process of conducting study with the aim now being:

To explore the interpretation of the roles of student and social care practitioner as well as the development and change in the social identities of student and professional in a group (n=15) of adult students undertaking a degree course to obtain a qualification required for their occupation as social care workers.

The research questions that guided the analysis of data were:

- How is the role of the student interpreted and what structural factors impact on it?
- How is the role of the social care practitioner interpreted?
- How do student identity and social care practitioner identity interact when studying for a professional qualification?

The next section will outline the origin of and different schools with symbolic interactionism and describe the common elements between these schools as a precursor to the discussion and defence of the structural symbolic interactionist model, the theoretical framework for identity used in my study, in the next chapter.

Symbolic Interactionism

Stryker and Vyrant (2003) identify the philosophy of pragmatism as being a direct influence on symbolic interactionism. Pragmatists view humans as active and creative beings who have a conscious role in their own destinies (Meltzer *et al.*, 1975). Maines (2000), in turn, suggests that the sources of pragmatism exist in a neo-Hegelian view that rejected dualistic separation between mind and body, individual and social. Meltzer *et al.* (1975, p.2) see this inseparability of individual and society as being basic to symbolic interactionism and it “is defined in terms of a mutually interdependent relationship, not a one-sided deterministic one”. Moreover society and social life are viewed as dynamic rather than static processes, being created and recreated as people interact (Stryker and Vyrant, 2003). The use of language is significant as it is the vehicle through which mind, self and society are formed (Reynolds, 2003).

According to Blumer (1969, p.1) symbolic interactionism refers to a “relatively distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct”. However there is variation in the extent to which schools or varieties of symbolic interactionism are seen as similar. Blumer (1969) proposes that although theorists within the perspective have significant differences in their thought and proposition there is also similarity. On the other hand, Fisher and Strauss (1978) suggest there are two different traditions of interactionism with different intellectual underpinnings. One is rooted in the work of Thomas and Park and the other developed by Blumer from the work of George Herbert Mead. Many symbolic interactionists do not distinguish between these traditions due to being exposed to a more generalised interactionist viewpoint (Fisher and Strauss, 1978). Meltzer *et al.* (1975), in their identification of four varieties of symbolic interactionism, (Chicago School, Iowa School, dramaturgical and ethnomethodology), point out a methodological division,

particularly between the first two, Atkinson and Housely (2003) note that accounts of the Chicago school emphasise the use of qualitative techniques while understating the role of quantitative methods also used. Stryker (2007, p.1083-1084) distinguishes between 'traditional' symbolic interactionism and structural symbolic interactionism according to the extent to which the latter focuses on social structural settings "within which persons' selves develop and social interaction takes place" and the "linking of social interaction to roles and to identities". However a common origin is suggested, in the work of James, Cooley, Mead and Thomas as well as Blumer and Kuhn (Burke and Stets, 2009). Throughout the rest of this section the main concepts of symbolic interactionism are discussed.

Objects, Symbols and Meanings

A significant aspect of symbolic interactionism according to Blumer (1969) is the concept of objects. Snow (2001, p.10) suggests that objects can only be understood in the contexts in which they are embedded. "An object is anything that can be indicated, anything that is pointed or referred to". While the world consists of objects the nature of an object is the meaning it has for the person it is an object for. Thus an object can have different meanings for different people and it is through interaction that one learns the meaning that objects have for others. The process of mutual indications allows the emergence of common objects "that have the same meaning for a given set of people and are seen in the same manner by them" (Blumer, 1969, p.11).

Objects therefore are symbols, as are gestures. The latter Mead (1925, p.270) defines as "that part of the act or attitude of one individual engaged in a social act which serves as the stimulus to the other individual to carry out his part of the whole act". Thus the person who presents the gesture, whether verbal or through body language, offers it as a sign of what s/he "is planning to do as well as what he wants the respondent to do or understand" (Blumer, 1969, p.9). For communication and interaction to be effective the gesture must have common meaning for those involved. Burke and Stets (2009) point out that the meaning of symbols is socially defined. They are relative to social groups so therefore meanings may not be understood by other groups. In the college environment difficulties

have been reported by mature students regarding communication in lectures and feedback on assignments, suggesting difficulties for students and staff in taking the perspective of the other, or role taking, which will be discussed below.

As can be seen meaning is central in the symbolic interactionist perspective. Rather than meaning “existing within an individual’s psychic make up” it arises from people’s interpretations in social interaction with others (Blumer, 1969, p.2).

Social Interaction

Social interaction therefore permits the emergence of sharing of meaning. In addition interaction is viewed as forming human behaviour and self, as in Cooley’s concept of the ‘looking glass self’ (1918 cited in Meltzer *et al.*, 1975). In the process of interaction people must account for the actions or potential actions of others and direct their own conduct in accordance. “[...] the activities of others enter as positive factors in the formation of their own conduct; in the face of the actions of others one may abandon an intention or purpose, revise it, check it or suspend it, intensify it or replace it” (Blumer, 1969, p.8). Cooley (1918 cited in Meltzer *et al.*, 1975) proposed that through the study of interaction we can understand the interdependence of individuals and society. Cooley also developed Mead and Dewey’s notions of individual behaviour in society by introducing the concept of groups and how these affected the motivations of individual behaviours (*ibid*). Thus human society is made up of people engaging in action, whether individually, collectively, or as group representatives (Blumer, 1969). In the same way social structure and culture are located in action and interaction. Blumer (1969) proposes social structure “refers to relationships derived from how people act towards each other” (p.7) and “culture is derived from what people do” (p.6). In structural symbolic interactionism and its offshoot, identity theory, social structure is also viewed as being created by the actions of people “though it is recognised that these actions are produced in the context of the social structure they create and are influenced by this context” (Burke and Stets, 2009, pp.3-4). In identity theory the concept of identity links the individual and society.

Cooley (1909 cited in Meltzer *et al*, 1975) also saw society as consisting of complex processes of reciprocal activity but, in addition, suggested that the social organisation of society exists in the minds of the individuals making up the social unit. “In actuality there is no ‘mind of society’ but many different minds that exist through a sharing of expectations and behaviour [...]” (Cooley, 1909, p.4 cited in Meltzer *et al*, 1975, p.9). Thus meaning, originating in and expressed in action and interaction, is viewed as central in the development of self, society and culture. Language, as it is crucial to interaction, plays an essential role (Howard, 2000).

Language

“A system of significant symbols forms a language, and through the use of language one comes by, or acquires, the definitions or meaning of other parties in society” (Reynolds, 1993, p.58). It is also through language that one acquires a sense of self and incorporates into oneself social elements from one’s social settings (Reynolds, 2003). Language permits reflexivity and viewing oneself as an object (Stryker, 1980).

Reflexivity and the Human Mind

In the symbolic interactionist perspective people are viewed as self-reflective beings. This originated in the work of Mead (1925) with his proposal of self-consciousness in humans, made possible by the structure of the central nervous system. Possessing self-consciousness permits the person to see himself as an object but this emerges through social interaction with others, suggesting the self is inherently social.

It is just because the individual finds himself taking the attitudes of the others who are involved in his conduct that he becomes an object for himself. It is only by taking the roles of others that we have been able to come back to ourselves.

(Mead, 1925, p.268)

“Persons’ reflexivity, their responses to themselves, link larger social processes to the interaction in which they engage” (Stryker and Vyrant, 2003, p.5). When assigned a role

within a social structure, through reflection on prior experience in similar roles and reactions of others individuals interpret the meaning of that role (Burke and Tully, 1977: Stets and Burke, 2000).

Role Taking and Role Making

As mentioned previously the process of role taking, that is understanding the intentions from the viewpoint of the others in the interaction, is seen as necessary for communication to be effective (Blumer, 1969). It is also through role taking that humans develop a sense of self. Role taking allows one to anticipate and monitor the potential consequences of one's action thus permitting changing or redirecting behaviour. "Prior experience with those others, knowledge of the social categories in which they are located, and symbolic cues emerging in interaction provide tentative definitions and expectations that are validated and/or reshaped in interaction" (Stryker and Vyan, 2003, p.7). When roles are inconsistent or intangible but interaction must occur the process of role-making happens, in which roles are created or modified in responses to roles enacted by others. The more complex and differentiated the society is the less likely it is that there are shared meanings or contradictory meanings held by parties in interaction, which results in inaccurate role-taking and role-making thus complicating social interaction (*ibid*).

Agency

Snow (2001) proposes that human agency is one of the underpinning principles of symbolic interactionism. People have choice in their actions taking into account structural and social constraints. As Stryker and Vyan, (2003, p.6) put it constraints are "variably effective in closing off or in enabling particular lines of action" sometimes "precluding action" and other times "being of minimal import". Self-reflection allows agency with behaviour seen as not being simply caused by either internal or social factors "but what lies in between, a reflective and socially derived interpretation of the internal and external stimuli that are present" (Melzer *et al.*, 1975, p.2). Therefore a student's behaviour in the college environment is not just the product of their own internal needs and drives or the external expectations of the environment but the result of their interpretation of both. As mentioned above people actively interpret and negotiate the meanings of roles within the social

structure thus exercising agency. In addition the possibility of social change affords agency (Snow, 2001).

Multiple Identities

William James is considered to have instigated the view of the self as being multi-faceted (Stryker, 1980). James's (1890, cited in Meltzer *et al.*, 1975) conception of a social self focuses attention on the interaction between individuals and their social groups. The idea of people having multiple identities is emphasised within structural symbolic interactionism:

People possess multiple identities because they occupy multiple roles, are members of multiple groups and claim multiple personality characteristics, yet the meaning of these identities are shared by members of society.

(Burke and Stets, 2009, p.3)

To summarise, despite some variation within the symbolic interactionist perspective with regard to methodology and the emphasis on social structure there are many common features. The symbolic interactionist perspective views people as active, conscious and reflexive beings in dialectical relationship with a dynamic society. Communication occurs symbolically through objects, gestures and language. Common meaning is generated through interaction. Interaction with others forms the self, behaviour, social structure and cultures. Reflexivity enables the person to know him/herself and links social processes to people's interactive behaviour. Also through the capacity to reflect on the self people are afforded agency, as they interpret and negotiate the meaning of roles within the social structure. The multiplicity of roles results in multiple identities associated with these roles.

Symbolic interactionism was chosen to inform the theoretical framework because of the assumption that people have multiple changing identities. However structural symbolic interactionism is more appropriate to the aim of the research and the research questions because both macro- and micro-structural factors impact on the available role

interpretations and identity construction of student and social care practitioner. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Overview of Thesis

In *Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework of Identity*, the concept of identity is examined with a discussion and defence of the theoretical framework of structural symbolic interactionism for investigating how individuals interpret the roles of student and social care practitioner and form identities from these role interpretations.

Chapter 3, Student Role, Identity and the Impact of Structural Factors gives a review of literature pertaining to the interpretation of the role of the adult student, including learning theories and examines some of the structural factors that have been reported to impact on the formation of student identity.

In *Chapter 4, Professional Identity and Professional Education in Social Care*, the concept of professional identity is discussed. Also explored in this chapter is the impact of professional learning particularly with regard to social care work and factors encouraging and inhibiting integration of student and social care worker identities through the transfer of learning across contexts highlighted.

The qualitative methodology that guided the collection and analysis of data is discussed in *Chapter 5*. The research process is also described.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the main findings of the study in relation to existing literature. Commonalities and differences in participants' interpretations of the role of social care practitioner are presented in relation to counter-roles and structural factors. Participants' identities as students and social care practitioners are described, as is the interaction between these identities in relation to the effect of education on their professional status and work practices as well as the interaction between social care practitioner identity and student identity.

In *Chapter 7* the main findings of the study are concluded in relation to their implications for social care and educational practice. Changes made to my own teaching practice based on the findings of my study are outlined.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter began by explaining the rationale for the research, followed by an outline of educational policies and consequent views of third level education in Ireland. An overview of the historical origins of social care work and the ongoing process of professionalisation was then given. Following this the aims of the research and the development of the guiding research questions was explained. Next the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism was summarised and the main concepts of the perspective discussed. The chapter concluded with an overview of the content of each chapter of the thesis.

The next chapter will examine the concept of identity with a discussion and defence of the theoretical framework of structural symbolic interactionism for investigating how individuals interpret the roles of student and social care practitioner and form identities from these role interpretations.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework of Identity

Overview of Chapter

In this chapter modernist and post-modernist views of identity are discussed relative to symbolic interactionist views, in particular the structural symbolic interactionist view. The structural symbolic interactionist framework is then compared to other views of identity and thus defended. It is argued that the structural symbolic interactionist view of identity is most appropriate for addressing the aims and research questions. This theory of identity allows for variation in interpretations and levels of identification with the roles of student and social care practitioner, thus avoiding a 'species' approach (James, 1995). It also provides a coherent framework in which the relationship between the two social identities that are the focus of my study can be explored, as well as permitting examination of the impact of other social identities and personal identity. The structural symbolic interactionist view of identity locates role interpretation and identity formation within the social structures in which individuals live and behave, thus providing a structure in which both the micro-structures of the educational institution and macro-structures such as societal views of education and professionalisation in social care can be examined.

Theorising about Identity – Modernist and Post-modernist Views

Breakwell (1986) suggests that, while the term identity is used as if it were unproblematic, it is quite the opposite. The meaning given to the term varies according to the theoretical and methodological framework in which it is used. In addition, the term identity and other terms such as self-concept, personality and character are often difficult to distinguish.

Langbaum (1977, cited in Gleason, 1983, p.911) asserted "that identity did not take on psychological connotations until the empiricist philosophers called into question what he calls 'the unity of the self.'" He argues that the term identity was used by Locke and Hume to question the unity of the self.

The unity of the self was not a problem so long as the traditional Christian conception of the soul held sway, but it became a problem when Locke declared that a man's 'identity [...] consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued Life, by constantly fleeting Particles of Matter, in succession vitally united to the same organised Body'

(Langbaum, 1977, cited in Gleason, 1983, p.911)

While Freud introduced the term identification to describe the process by which an infant integrates objects in the external world with him/herself (Gleason, 1983) the beginning of theorising about identity is credited to Erik Erikson. Schwartz (2001; 2002) and Bendle (2002) locate the origin of the development of the multitude of psychological theories about identity to Erikson's 1950 work, *Childhood and Society*. Indeed Vyran *et al.* (2003, p.367) suggest that Erikson's work "inspired interactionist to take up the concept of identity".

Erikson sees identity formation as being largely located within the adolescent period of development. Identifications developed from childhood experiences are questioned and reorganised, as well as integrated with developing sexual feelings and available social roles and synthesised into a coherent identity. Hence central to Erikson's notion of identity are coherence and continuity where healthy functioning requires synthesis to predominate over confusion (Erikson, 1950, 1968). As discussed throughout this section the notions of continuity and coherence are central in views of identity that propose multiple identities, particularly how continuity and coherence are achieved.

In Erikson's theory, identity development occurs in, and is affected by, the individual's socio-historical circumstances as the "number of socially meaningful models for workable combinations of identification fragments" is limited by society (Erikson, 1968, p.53), a viewpoint similar to that of structural symbolic interactionists. However the individual is conceived of as a separate bounded entity with an individual identity. Additionally the normative expectation is that identity is formed largely during adolescence, a point that Amett (2000) disagrees with, arguing that during early adulthood there is a "wider scope of

possible activities [...] less likely to be constrained by role requirements” (p.471). Burr (1995) and Côté (1996) suggest that Erikson’s model is typical of modernism where identity is ‘achieved’ on one’s own and limited by social structures, as opposed to the “plurality of choices” affecting identity formation in late modern times⁹ (Giddens, 2000, p.256). The rational, bounded, self-directed model of the person assuming that healthy functioning in adulthood is best achieved with an integrated and consistent identity implicit in modernist views is argued to be no longer viable, as people are now living in multiple realities, each with their own expectations and demands (Gergen, 2000). Chappell *et al.* (2003, p.13) argue that “universal social and normative frames of reference” for identity have been eroded by “increasing social and cultural mobility” as well as “increasing pluralisation of society”. In the symbolic interactionist perspective, as discussed in *Chapter 1*, society is seen as being dynamically created and recreated through interaction so both the availability of roles from which to form identities and the expectations of these roles changes. In addition the process of role making, as discussed in *Chapter 1*, allows for negotiation and change in the meaning of roles and thus identities. However since verification of identity performances by those with whom we interact is related to our psychological well-being there is an element of conformity to expected role behaviours (Cooley, 1902, cited in Thoits, 2003).

While post-modern theorists, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, emphasise the multiplicity of, and fleeting nature of identities, they still seek to explain continuity and coherence between multiple identities, as do symbolic interactionists. For example, Gergen proposes that in late modern culture identity is defined by the individual through relationships with others and so is continuously changing “as we move through a sea of changing relationships” (in Sanoff, 1991, n.p.). Therefore the notion of a stable or true self is rejected. Instead we construct different selves in different social encounters, which are not necessarily consistent with each other (Burr, 1995). Hence the need for personal coherence or consistency is rejected, but yet writers still appeal to the notion of stability. Wetherell and Maybin (1996, p.227), for example, suggest that an impression of stability

⁹ Modernist and late or post-modernist views of identity have not emerged in a coherent timeline but as with many psychological theories have co-existed together as alternative theoretical frameworks across time.

must be given so that individuals can be “recognised as behaving in meaningful ways”, in the same way that symbolic interactionists in discussing personal identity proffer that “we expect stable enactments of personal identity from ourselves and others” (Vyran *et al.*, 2003, p.382). Burr (1995) suggests that memory allows us to have a sense of a single, unified self by constructing a narrative that gives the impression of continuity and consistency. Gergen (2001) also proposes that identity at any time is the result of a life story or self-narrative. Narratives must be coherent, fit with cultural conventions and with other behaviours to be valid. Chappell *et al.* (2003, pp.46-47) see narrative identity formation as involving the interdependent processes of, firstly, “reflexive identification” (that a person sees her/himself as continuous over time) and, secondly, “relational identification” (that a person sees her/himself as similar or counter to others).

These views are not dissimilar to the structural symbolic interactionist position on personal and social identities. Personal identity, as outlined above, refers to the more enduring aspects of the self, which we use to define ourselves, and as discussed in *Chapter 1*, the reflexive capacity of the human being is central in symbolic interactionism. Social identities are formed through identification with social groups where the individual internalises behaviour associated with such groups and counter to other groups in the social structure. Vyran *et al.* (2003) suggest that personal identities are constructed and presented to others through personal stories or narratives in which we choose to include and exclude aspects of personal history. In addition they are “influenced by structured features of social reality” locating “individuals within various socially structured sets of relations” (*ibid*, p. 379).

Gergen (2001, p. 249) defines a self-narrative as being a “linguistic implement embedded with conversational sequence of action and employed in relationships in such a way as to sustain, enhance, or impede various forms of action.” In the same way the cognitive schema proposed by Stryker and Burkner (2000) is a way of organising and relating identities impact on the behaviour of individuals in interactions and lead to certain actions.

In other words to be valid a narrative depends on verification by others (Gergen, 2001). As discussed below, verification by others could be achieved through conformity, not only to our personal life stories but also to the “norms attached to the role [social] identities we hold”, which in effect acts “to reproduce and sustain the social order” (Thoits, 2003, p.179). Thus in effect, the narrative view on identity formation is essentially similar to the structural symbolic interactionist view in that while meaning of roles and identities can be negotiated they are still limited by the existing social structures and other identities.

Overview of Structural Symbolic Interactionist View of Identity

As outlined in *Chapter 1*, symbolic interactionism has its roots in the philosophy of pragmatism, with its belief that humans are active and creative and have a conscious part in their own destinies (Meltzer *et al.*, 1975). Breakwell (1986) traces the origin of the symbolic interactionist view of identity to Hegel’s (1807) assertion that the individual acquires a mind of his/her own through practical activity and observation of the changes made to objects in the external world. Through interaction with other people in the social world the individual recognises his/her psychological qualities and thus realises that “other people must see himself or herself as possessing these qualities too” (Breakwell, 1986, p. 28). Foote (1951) however is credited with being the first interactionist to theorise about the concept of identity (Vyrant *et al.*, 2003). Foote (1951) argued that identity theories such as those of Erikson and traditional interactionist theory of the time lacked the ability to explain motivation in behaviour. In line with interactionist views he stressed the importance of language, defining others and assuming and negotiating roles.

Identities are viewed as symbols, the meanings of which are negotiated through interaction. Identities are developed from the roles we occupy in society and are formed when one is “cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of [...] participation or membership in social relations” (Stone, 1962, p.93). For example when one enrolls in a college course one is put in the social role of student and is identified by those with whom one interacts within that social context as a student. This role leads to particular expectations of behaviour from other actors in that social context. However, as discussed in *Chapter 1*, when the meaning of the role is not clear the process of role making occurs,

which can complicate social interaction. In addition to being symbols, in structural symbolic interactionism, identities are seen as cognitive schemas “internally stored information and meanings serving as frameworks for interpreting experiences”. Thus identities, while socially constructed, are internalised to form mental structures, which play a role in defining situations in turn increasing “receptivity to certain cues for behaviour” (Stryker and Burke, 2000, p. 286).

The concept of identity is distinguished from that of self by emphasising the social and multi-faceted nature of the former with the latter being conceptualised as a superordinate concept consisting of an assortment of identities each “associated with particular interactional settings or roles” (Burke and Tully, 1977, p.883). The structural symbolic interactionist view of identity differs from that of traditional symbolic interactionism by placing greater emphasis on both social and cognitive structures and their impact on interaction. “[...] behaviour [is viewed] not as emergent and nondeterministic [...] but as determined by antecedent variables to do with aspects of the self as well as with historical, developmental and social conditions” (Gecas and Burke, 1995. p. 43). As stated above, the concept of self is seen to be comprised of an assortment of identities, some more pervasive than others. Vyran *et al.* (2003) explain through distinguishing between different levels of identities. Gecas and Burke (1995) point out that all identities were initially situation specific continued interaction in situations which invoke particular identities leads to some identities being more pervasive than others.

Social structures impact on identities through evaluation in social interaction. Thoits (2003, p. 179) refers to the work of Cooley (1902) suggesting that because “we not only know ourselves through the eyes of others, but evaluate our worth, goodness, and competence through others’ eyes as well, we are motivated to gain the rewarding approval of other people by anticipating and meeting their expectations”. Thus, while we can adapt and change behaviours within roles we can also conform to expected role behaviour.

Levels of Identity

Situational identity is seen as the way we construct and position ourselves and others in specific situations. We announce these identities to others and others consign them to us within a social interaction (Stone, 1962) and our behaviour in a situation “is oriented in part to our ongoing management of our own and others’ situational identities (Goffman 1959)” (Vyran *et al.*, 2003, p.368). While situational identities are impacted on by socio-cultural role availability and norms renegotiation is possible. As Goffman (1959) puts it we constantly engage “in a process of identity presentation and confirmation, acting collectively to ensure that our own and others’ situational identity claims are validated and managed” (cited in Vyran *et al.*, 2003 p.379). Situational identities however are framed by structural factors yet are considered the least stable aspect of identity particularly as we “navigate ever-evolving situations” and “challenge as well as reproduce social conventions” (Vyran *et al.*, 2003, p.382). Thus we express agency within the constraints of the social structure.

Social identities are formed from identification with social roles (Stets and Burke, 2000) within reference groups based on factors such as gender, occupation and other group affiliations (Vyran *et al.*, 2003). Thus we have many social identities, which are displayed in situational identity performances. Structural symbolic interactionists, such as Stryker and Burke (Stryker, 1968; Stryker and Burke, 2000), propose that these multiple social identities are organised in a hierarchy of salience affected by the extent and intensity of commitment to a given identity. This will be discussed later in the chapter. Available social identities are limited by social structures, “making some social identities and role-related behaviours less accessible or even unavailable to certain classes of people” (Vyran *et al.*, 2003, p.380).

The most enduring of the three levels of identity is personal identity, as it impacts on all other identities. Personal identity includes features such as appearance, name, kin relationships and personal history (Goffman 1963 in Vyran *et al.*, 2003). Stets and Burke (2000, p.229) suggest that personal identity is the set of meanings that “sustain the self as an individual”. These meanings include abilities, beliefs, feelings, goals and attributes

which operate across different situations and roles. Such self-beliefs have been found to be more likely to influence behaviour when individuals perceive themselves to behave consistently with regard to them (Bem and Allen, 1974).

Formation of Identities

As mentioned above identities are formed from the roles people occupy in the social structure. However a distinction is made between the roles occupied and identification with the roles, as people do not necessarily identify with the roles they enact (Vyrant *et al.*, 2003). To form an identity from a social role the individual must internalise the meanings he or she associates with that role (Burke and Franzoi, 1988). As discussed in *Chapter 1*, individuals do not passively behave in line with role expectations, but actively negotiate the meaning of roles. Pre-existing social identities and aspects of personal identity impact on the interpretation of roles. Schlenker (1980) argues that when expected and even actual behaviour contradicts aspects of personal identity individuals will not internalise their self-presentations, instead accounting for their behaviour in other ways. The individual is seen as being able to influence societally defined meanings of role through making changes to social arrangements to achieve consistency between their interpretation of the role and pre-existing identities (Burke and Stets, 1999; Stets and Burke, 2000).

As roles exist within a social structure it is proposed that roles can only be understood in relation to the counter-roles in that social structure (Burke and Tully, 1977). For example research on mature students indicates that the role of mature student is often defined in opposition to younger students (e.g. Avis, 1997; Warmington, 2002).

Situation

A main tenet of symbolic interactionism is “that behaviour can only be understood within a particular situational context” (Burke and Franzoi, 1988, p.559). They propose that the situation is influenced by, firstly “the location or place defined by social conventions” which “signals the appropriate identity” and “facilitates proper role construction or performance” (p.561). Secondly are the expectations and relationships in the situation.

How the individual behaves in the situation, as well as the expectations they have, is also affected by the identities they already possess, in that he or she selects from their repertoire of possible active and latent identities to guide their behaviour. Stryker and Serpe's (1982) work demonstrates how existing student identities initially guide the expression of behaviour in a new learning environment and when the social structure and interactions of the new environment do not validate these old identities these are adjusted and changed. Thus individual agency and social structures interact to create and recreate identities.

Social meanings structure situations and social interactions, so the broader socio-political context impacts on the role expectations of the professional and the student. "[...] we need to understand them [identities] as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (Hall, 1996:2000, p.17). In my study significant macro factors are the representations and discourses surrounding education in Ireland as well as the view of social care work and the process of professionalisation as discussed in *Chapter 1*.

Motivation

Foote (1951, p.14) explains how motivation relates to role behaviour and the formation of identities from roles. He suggests that motivation accounts for why an individual is apathetic "in the performance of conventional roles, when these are on the verge of abandonment or are accepted only under duress" as well clarifying why a person engages in role making.

Identities are a source of motivation in that the individual is motivated to behave in ways that are consistent with the identity (Burke and Franzoi, 1988) or seek out opportunities to enact a role associated with a particular identity (Nuttbrock and Freudiger, 1991). Motivation relates to the salience the identity holds for the individual and the extent of their commitment to that identity (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Identity salience is defined by Hoelter (1986, p.141) as "the relative importance or centrality of a given identity (and thus role) for defining oneself". An individual has many

identities that are organised into a hierarchy of salience. The identities at the top of the hierarchy are the least situation specific and have greater influence over an individual's behaviour (Burke and Tully, 1977). Stryker (1968) proposes that a highly salient identity will be enacted independent of situational cues or the individual will seek out opportunities to enact highly salient identities (Serpe and Stryker, 1987). The activation of the identity then acts upon and changes the situation. In the process it produces self-verification, which is the need for individuals to achieve consistency between their view of their identity and others views of it (Riley and Burke, 1995). When an identity is not verified doubt about the identity occurs which affects behaviour in that "action is paralysed" (Foote, 1951, p.18) so the identity needs to be adapted, as stated above. The position of identities on the salience hierarchy can change when individuals experience changes in their lives (Stryker and Burke, 2000).

Self-verification impacts on self-esteem and self-efficacy. When an identity is important for an individual and he or she receives positive feedback for their role performance related to that identity self-esteem increases (Hoetler, 1986). Performing well in the role increases self-efficacy, in that the individual develops an increased mastery over their environment (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983). It has also been found that positive evaluations of one's performance in a role related to a particular identity increases the salience of that identity (Hoelter, 1983). In a study on motherhood Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991) found that the salience of an identity was related to role gratification (intrinsic satisfaction associated with the role); the tendency to give time and energy to a role (personal sacrifice) and the tendency to accept the responsibilities of the role without assistance (burden acceptance).

The salience of an identity is proposed to be related to the commitment an individual has to that identity. Commitment to an identity is "defined as the extent to which social relationships depend on being a certain type of person, or alternatively, as the social costs (in terms of relationships) entailed in losing a particular identity" (*ibid*, p.148).

Identities are also proposed to have an affective component, identity prominence, defined as "the extent to which identities are associated with 'strength of feeling'" (*ibid*, p.147). By

enacting identities the individual satisfies their needs and desires. “[...] the degree of identity prominence is revealed by emotional responses to evaluation in conjunction with role performances” (*ibid*, p.147). Identity prominence affects the tendency of the individual to accept the responsibilities of the role. Thus an individual who receives positive feedback for their performance in the student role is proposed to increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy. This in turn increases their commitment to the role and salience of the identity.

The structural symbolic interactionist view of identity has many features in common with the traditional symbolic interactionist view in that both emphasise the importance of interaction and language in identity formation. However the structural position gives greater import to social structures and pre-existing identities in defining and constraining possible role performances and thus identities and thus is more appropriate to address the research questions in my study. Identity is multiple and is proposed to have various levels. It is initially situational. The next level is that of social identities, formed when expectations attached to social roles are internalised. The most enduring and pervasive level is personal identity, consisting of factors that we use, across situations and roles to define ourselves. Identities are related to each other in a cognitive schema, organised in a hierarchy of salience. The more salient an identity the more impact it has on an individual’s behaviour and the individual make seek out opportunities to enact salient identities. The salience of an identity is affected by validation of that identity by others in interaction, which in turn increases self-efficacy, willingness to accept the burdens attached to the role, as well as commitment to and prominence of the identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that modernist theoretical concepts of identity appear to be no longer viable in today’s society, due to uncertainty and plurality of choice. Post-modernists views have been considered problematic because of their questioning of stability of the self (Bendle 2002). However, as discussed above, post-modernist views propose that people need to provide a sense of continuity and coherence of self and do so through life-stories or self-narratives. While the influence of social structures is downplayed the need for the self as presented to others through narrative to fit with cultural conventions, can be considered

to account for how social structures limit how one presents the self. Thus while, as discussed above, there are similarities between views that propose multiple identities, the structural symbolic interactionist model provides a more coherent framework in which to examine the relationship between social role, identities and behaviour, change and stability in identity, as well as examination of micro- and macro- social contexts on identity formation and change. Merrill (1999, p.22), in her study of mature female students in higher education in the U.K., argues for a theoretical perspective that combines “micro and macro or action and structure” to understand the processes by which students understand and shape their experiences.

The next chapter will focus on literature on adult learners and learning in higher education as it relates to the research question ‘how is the role of the student interpreted?’ Factors in college environments found to impact on the role and identity of adult students as well as prior experiences of learning will be discussed using Engeström’s activity theory as a framework.

Chapter 3

Student Role, Identity and the Impact of Structural Factors

Overview of Chapter

As discussed in the preceding two chapters, symbolic interactionism proposes a dialectical relationship between the person and their social surroundings. Thus the available interpretations of the role of the student and the student identity formed, are located within both macro- and micro-social structures. In this chapter literature on adult students in further and higher education is reviewed in relation to how aspects of these social contexts impact on the interpretation of the role of student and the student identity formed. Thus the focus is on literature relating to the first research question: How is the role of the student interpreted and what structural factors impact on it?

Firstly the factors in the macro-social context of views of education, barriers to education and the economic cost of social care practice education are briefly discussed. The next part of the chapter focuses on the micro- social environment of educational institutions. This is structured using Engström's theories of activity systems. As discussed in the preceding chapters symbolic interactionism is considered to have its roots in pragmatism and the work of Hegel (Meltzer *et al.* 1975; Maines, 2000; Stryker and Vyrant, 2003). Similarly activity theory (Engeström, 1999) has origins in the work of Hegel (Blunden, 2007). Aspects of the college community or activity systems such as relationships with staff, pedagogical practices, how knowledge is viewed, assessment and relationships with student peers are discussed in relation to how they affect the interpretation of the student role and the formation of a student identity. Then factors located within the individual are examined as the mental models (Sandars, 2005) and prior learner identities that the student brings with them to the college environment are the starting point from which the student identity is constructed (Collier, 2000). Literature on views of the student role and the effect of previous learning experiences is reviewed, along with research on reported changes and

development of student and other identities through the educational process. Finally, since the student is a member of several communities or activity systems simultaneously and has multiple social identities the relationship with other social identities is briefly discussed.

Macro-social Factors

Regarding macro level factors, as discussed in *Chapter 1* the view of higher education in Ireland is one in which education is valued and associated with economic success at a societal (Dunne, 2002) and individual level (Alheit and Merrill, 2001). However inequalities to the participation of adult learners and also exist (Collins, 2000; Inglis and Murphy, 1999). Collins (2000) points out the discretionary nature of mature student entry to higher education in Ireland, with mature students being selected by individual institutions as opposed to clearly delineated performance in the Leaving Certificate¹⁰. This has been reported to contribute to the view that college is a place for the young (Lynch, 1997).

In addition, linked to the professionalisation process of social care practice is the drive for increasing the number of qualified staff in the sector. As outlined in *Chapter 1* the economic cost of professional education for social care staff has resulted in social care practice students having limited time in college, which could affect the formation of a student identity. Merrill (1999) reports that some of the part-time students she interviewed were reluctant to use the term student at all, suggesting that the time spent in college affects the salience of student identity.

Micro-social Factors

At the micro-social level the behaviour of those the student relates with in the learning environment is relevant as the student identity is formed and developed in interaction with

¹⁰ The Leaving Certificate is the state examination taken by children at the end of second level education in Ireland. From results points for third level courses are calculated. While most children sit seven or eight subjects (including Mathematics, English, Irish, and another language points for university are calculated from results on their best six subjects. The maximum number of points that can be achieved is 600 which represents A1s (90 to 100%) on six subjects, taken at honours level. An honours level subject is considered to represent two thirds of the workload of an A level in the U.K. as an A grade in an A level is awarded 150 points for entry to Irish universities.

the people and the social practices within that environment (Edwards and MacKenzie, 2005).

Using Engström's (1999) activity model as a framework through which to view the teaching process, the behaviour of the teacher is seen as directed towards the learning of the student. The teacher can use various socially derived internal factors (beliefs about teaching and learning) and external artefacts (textbooks, computers etc.) in facilitating the learning of the student. However the teacher is working within a community which is comprised of other people and rules (e.g. class contact time; appropriate interaction with students; curricula; marking schemes) that affect their behaviour. Within this activity system or community each individual has a particular role. As Sanders (2005, p.194) states:

[...] all outcomes are determined by a complex mix of culturally derived mediating influences, which comprise mental models held by each individual (subject) and more wider socially embedded influences within the community of which each subject is a part. There is a constant dynamic interaction between the internal and external mediating influences.

This indicates a need to examine literature regarding the college environment and staff relationships, beliefs about adult learning and learners and their relationship with pedagogical practices as well as the view of knowledge and how learning is assessed.

Staff relationships

The role of the institution specifically the cultural location of the college, the atmosphere within the college and the level of tutor understanding and support are suggested to affect the development of student identity (Gallacher *et al.*, 2002; *Learning Journeys Report*, n.d.). Particularly the development of support strategies through classroom activities is seen as essential, due to the time constraints on learners with multiple responsibilities in utilising other college supports (Ross-Gordon, 2003). Gallacher *et al.*, (2002) propose that the behaviour of tutors in creating a relaxed and supportive learning environment is essential to

enable adult students to build a successful student identity. Positive attitudes towards learning and the development of critical thinking skills (Boud *et al.*, 1985; Prior, 2000; Senior, 2001; Pollard, 2003), as well as problem-solving and management of own learning (Leung and Kember, 2005), are promoted when students feel safe and have good relationships with each other and staff. Feelings of safety can be particularly important when examining one's own experience and practices in work related courses as this can be challenging and even threatening (Bamber and Tett, 2000). A learning environment in which students feel supported and valued can lead to them transferring empowering behaviour to the groups they work with (Miers *et al.*, 2005), which is important in social care work. In addition to supportive relationships and feelings of safety in the college environment the pedagogical practices of staff have a major impact on identity formation.

Pedagogical Practices

Chappell *et al.* (2003) suggest that different pedagogical practices represent and contribute to different student identities i.e. how staff views the student role, which is inherent in their pedagogical approach, affects available interpretations of their role by students and the subsequent identity formed. Haggis (2002) critiques the adoption of notions of adult learning such as self-direction, experiential learning and andragogical characteristics by policy and teaching methods as if they were unproblematic, but yet sees them as influences on assumptions of how adults learn. Chappell *et al.* (2003) criticise andragogical and humanistic adult learning traditions of being overly individualistic and accepting rather than challenging the social world. However, as referred to in the previous section, encouraging criticality and challenging work practices, which are located in socio-cultural contexts, can be seen as threatening for the work-related learner as it questions their occupational identity (Bamber and Tett, 2000) and can even contribute to resistance to learning (Hughes, 2000).

Tight (2002) notes that emphasis on the responsibility of the learner for his or her own learning is common within theories of adult education. This view has been supported by studies of adult learners, for example Hafford-Letchfield (2007, p.179) found that tutors of social work students in the U.K. were concerned that students be "ready to study and

manage themselves” and Merrill’s (1999) participants report expectations from staff that they be self-directed and self-responsible.

Kember and Gow (1994) suggest that the lecturer’s orientation to teaching (knowledge transmission or learning facilitation) influences students’ approaches to learning. Ross-Gordon (1991), in a study involving 181 undergraduate adult students, found that both aspects of learner-centred and teacher-led instruction were found in descriptions of effective teaching. Features such as clear presentations; well organised lectures; knowledgeable instructors; concern and respect for students; encouragement of discussion; availability to students and helpfulness are reported as being typical of ‘good’ teaching. Similar findings are reported by Merrill (1999), in addition to a preference for enthusiastic and “dynamic” lecturers. The use of practice examples and discussions to facilitate linking their experiences and theory is also found (Bishop-Clark and Lynch, 1992). This could be dependent on the subject being taught. For example, Sutherland (1999) reports that his sample of nurses did find a lecture format useful for factual subjects such as physiology. The individual’s student identity appears to have an influence also. Merrill (1999) reports variation among her participants with regard to the extent they preferred interactive, student-centred teaching, suggesting that this could be due to previous experiences of education and thus views about teaching and learning. On the other hand, even if not directly used in teaching, acknowledgement of students’ experiences is considered to be indicative of respect and acknowledgment of the status of adult learners (Johnston and Merrill, 2004). However Bamber and Tett (2000) point out the difficulties for students and tutors in incorporating work experiences into academic courses. Citing Whaley (1999) they suggest that tutors need to balance acceptance of students’ experiences yet encourage them to challenge and increase their understanding by embedding these experiences in theoretical contexts.

McCollin (2000) found that lecturers teaching adult students rated their teaching style as being more situational than teacher-led, indicating a difference in how adult students are perceived compared to their younger counterparts. Merrill (1999, p.148) discovered that lecturers see “mature students to be on a more equal basis with themselves than younger

students because of the age similarity". In a review of literature of lecturers' perception of adult students, adults are seen as "better learners" than younger students, "highly motivated, conscientious and well-focused" and "eager to participate in class" (Lynch and Bishop-Clark, 1998, p.219). Older students are considered to "make class meaningful", "be more interested in learning for the sake of learning" and "are willing to challenge the instructor" (Bishop Clark and Lynch, 1998, n.p.).

Williams (2009) argues that pedagogical practice should combine view both the position that learning involves the acquisition of knowledge and that learning is an engagement in a social practice. While in any formal learning situation there is a body of knowledge defined by the curriculum to be learning, students also become involved in social practices with their peers and lecturers. Viewing the college setting and the workplace as two communities of practice, which may share the same overall outcome (to improve social care practice; gain an educational qualification), there are important differences. In the workplace setting the model of learning is similar to the apprenticeship one examined by Lave and Wenger (1991) where the beginning social care practitioner learns through improvised practice. The curriculum is not dictated but "unfolds in opportunities to engage in practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.93). With this model of learning attention is focused on the "structures of social practice rather than [...] the structure of pedagogy" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.113). In the college setting, as Williams (2009) says, there is a dictated curriculum to be followed. However other skills necessary for the new student to be able to 'do' college appropriately are not as explicit. As Sandars (2004) points out if first year students are to be successfully integrated into the college 'community of practice' the tacit knowledge inherent in the assessment and marking process, must be made transparent to them. Another difficulty is the type of knowledge valued in the workplace as opposed to the college environment, which can lead to challenges to the individuals' occupational identity, due to the work-related nature of the course.

View of knowledge

Chappell *et al.* (2000) suggest that the view of knowledge represented in discourses in social settings acts to construct and reconstruct the identity of the learner. Adult students

report conflict between the 'knowing about' environment of the college and the 'knowing how to' environment of the workplace (MacDonald and Stratta, 1998; Martin, 2003). This is proposed to affect the students' orientation towards learning. Sutherland (1999), for example, reports that a sample of nurse tutors initially had a concrete rather than an abstract approach to learning, which he attributed to their experience of working in hospital wards.

Adams *et al.* (2006, p.57) suggest that "an idealised version of the profession" may be presented in an educational programme that is different from "the real work practised by the existing members of the profession" which could lead to rejection of the information. The view that theory is generated by academics "far removed from the real life practice setting" has been found with nurses (Burton, 2000 p.1011) and that theory is irrelevant 'jargon' among community educators (Bamber and Tett, 2000).

The view of knowledge held can be represented in the ways in which students' learning is assessed.

Assessment

Performing well in a role impacts on the individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983; Hoetler, 1986) thus increasing the salience of the identity for the individual hence their commitment to it (Stets and Burke, 2000) and the likelihood of it being enacted in other settings (Serpe and Stryker, 1987). Therefore positive feedback on an individual's performance as a student affects the identity formed, though individuals' views of what constitutes 'good' performance needs to be considered (Talyor, 1983, cited in Entwistle, 1987). In higher education grades and feedback on assessment are a primary way by which students judge their performance.

James (1995 p.463) argues that assessment and grading is a social practice with two aspects. Firstly is the belief, shared by students and lecturers, that grades are objective and rational "judgements of worth of academic products". Secondly, however, is that students interpret grades "as partially constitutive of personal worth", a viewpoint shared by Davies and Williams (2001). This indicates that judgements of performance can have a broader

effect impacting on aspects of personal identity that are related to student identity such as views of oneself as intelligent. Gallacher *et al.* (2002) see assessment as being a possible risk to identity through exposure to humiliation. The way in which feedback is given is also important as Hyland (2000, cited in Hounsell, 2003) reports that students often perceive tutor comments as being judgemental and focusing on their shortcomings rather than encouraging and confidence building. However Young's (2000) findings, with adult students on an Access course, indicate that the reaction to lecturer feedback is related to students' pre-existing level of self-esteem. She found that students with high self-esteem saw even critical comments as being positive while students with low self-esteem focused on criticism even when interspersed with positive comments. This is supported by others. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003), point out: "The lack of confidence and feelings of not being good enough of many students did not appear to be related to how well they were actually doing" (p.609). Entwistle (1987) cites the findings of Taylor (1983) which suggest that students form 'study contracts' for themselves which take account of their own goals and estimates of abilities, against which they measure their own success and failure. Thus the impact of grades and feedback needs to be considered in relation to judgements of what constitutes 'good' performance and the salience and prominence of student identity.

The mode of assessment is also significant, with examinations associated with the most fear and stress (e.g. Sutherland, 1999). Merrill's (1999) participants cited reasons of panic, poor memory and lack of skill for their dislike of examinations. Kelly (2005, p.214) suggests that examinations may have an inherent bias towards younger students who attend college directly from school, an environment "that places heavy emphasis on rote learning"¹¹ While older students' concerns about retention and memory could be at least partially due to societal beliefs about memory deterioration with age (Richardson and King, 1998) they are nevertheless real for the individual.

The relationship between the mode of assessment and what is to be assessed is significant for work-related courses. Heron and Chakrabarti, (2002a, p.191) report that their

¹¹ Kelly's research was conducted in Ireland where the Leaving Certificate uses a single 'closed book' examination overwhelmingly as a method of assessment with course work contributing little to final grades.

participants, who were undertaking SVQs for their occupation as social care workers, felt that the emphasis on written assessments resulted in writing skills being assessed rather than the actual practice of workers. “[...] people good at writing are not necessarily the ones with the best practice”.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, learning ‘how to do college’ or being integrated into the college ‘community of practice’ (Sandars, 2004) involves being prepared for assessment, particularly early in the course. As one of Merrill’s participants’ says, “knowing what they wanted and the way they wanted it written” (1999 p.142), allows students to perform better. Good performance in the student role affects self-efficacy and subsequent performances. Since students also interact with one another in college these relationships have been found to be significant in promoting self-efficacy, by providing support in different ways.

Role of Student Peers

Edwards and MacKenzie (2005), in their study of social support for learning, stress the need for an open as opposed to a regulated environment to enable students to learn together. Many studies indicate the value of peer support, for example in helping deal with the stress of juggling other roles (Shanahan, 2000); motivation (Tierney and Slack, 2005); recognition and awareness of being in a similar situation (Johnston and Merrill, 2004) and thus alleviating self-doubt (Merrill, 1999); networking and the sharing of information (Warmington, 2002) and motivation to continue engaging with learning (Crossan *et al.*, 2003). Havnes (2008, p.197) reports that as well as peer interaction involving discussions about curriculum, assignments and providing a way of recontextualising “the course content in the context of their daily lives” student initiated peer groups were fora where participants learned what it meant to be a student, thus contributing to the formation of their student identities.

Interaction with peers is also cited as contributing to cognitive development (Knapper and Cropley, 2000). Lazar (1995, p.62) documented the interactions of a study group of college students and concludes that “their study conversations served the intellectual, social and emotional needs of the student in profound ways”. Differences among individuals are

apparent though. For example Sutherland (1999, p.385) reports diversity among his group of 17 mature nurse tutor students, with some preferring solitary learning and others seeing learning “as essentially within a social context, including both formal seminars and informal coffee-table groups”.

Micro-social factors, or those present in the activity system of the college, examined indicate that both relationships with peers and staff and the pedagogical and assessment practices used contribute to the student identity formed. However, since students come to this learning experience with varying prior student identities, based on their past interactions factors within the individual need to be considered.

Individual Factors

Prior Learner Identities and Views of the Student Role

In the same way as the teacher of the adult learner is affected by internal beliefs derived from experience the initial orientation of the student and their interpretation of the student role are affected by their prior experiences. Bloomer *et al.* (2004, p.19) propose that the life history or ontogeny of learners is central to the study of social contexts in which learning takes place “as they reflect the history of individuals’ thinking, acting and acting over time and in unique combinations of engagement with social and cultural contexts that evolve over time”. Collier (2000) found that the new college student initially uses his or her identity as a student internalised from previous experiences of education, then adjusts this to align with the role of the student as perceived in the new setting. This can lead to initial expectations of the new learning environment. Hence the prior experiences of adult students should be considered.

Some literature indicates that adult students, particularly those who have had no prior contact with further or higher education, have negative experiences of formal education (e.g. Crossan *et al.*, 2003; Johnston and Merrill, 2004; Haggis, 2004). This has the effect of them being “initially tentative about engaging” due to “little confidence” and even hostility “towards educational institutions” (Crossan *et al.*, 2003, p.58). Participants are reported as viewing the educational system as failing them and not motivating them, leaving them with

a feeling of their education being incomplete (e.g. Merrill, 1999; Waller, 2006). Alternatively, other research suggests that adult students, while describing themselves as ‘non-academic’, did not find school a negative experience (e.g. *Learning Journey Report*, n.d.). Moore (2004) points out that the definition of oneself as practical or academic due to success in school needs to be considered within the socio-historical time period in which the individual lives. When educational possibilities are limited a short initial education is not necessarily seen as being connected to a lack of ability. As pointed out in *Chapter 1*, participation in higher education in Ireland is steadily increasing. Also for older participants financial factors could have affected their ability to participate in higher education after leaving secondary school as third level fees were only abolished in 1995.

The social perception of third level education and learning is also significant. Merrill (1999) states that some of her participants found the thought of entering the university environment daunting. Initial concerns about ability to learn are reported in studies of mature students, particularly among women (e.g. Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003; Moore, 2004). Brookfield (1999, p.11) notes feelings of ‘impostership’ among mature students, “that they are constantly on the verge of being found out to be too dumb and unprepared for college-level learning”. This could be related to perceived language differences between everyday life and the academic environment as concerns about the language used in lectures and assignments is reported (Murphy and Fleming, 1998; Merrill, 2001). This lack of self-confidence could, as suggested by Crozier and Garbet-Jones (1996, p.198), impact on identity formation as it can limit interactions with “tutors and fellow students” thereby preventing students taking “advantages of the opportunities for learning”. Insecurity and feelings of alienation can “ironically masquerade as overconfidence or arrogance” (Kelly, 2005, p.218) also affecting the types of interactions in the educational setting, thus the identity formed.

Meyer and Shanahan (2001, p.128) distinguish between the prior knowledge about subjects that students bring with them and beliefs about the nature of knowledge and what learning is. They claim both of these aspects will at least partially explain variation among students in “their engagement with the content and context of learning”. As discussed above, for

work-related courses the individual's occupational or professional identity also impacts. However if student identity is viewed as dynamic and reactive to the social structures of the institution, in particular those with whom the student interacts this should change. Different interpretations of the student role with regard to learning and responsibilities with concomitant expectations of the role of lecturers are apparent in the literature.

Kember *et al.* (2003; 2004)¹², from interviews with thirty-five experienced and eighteen novice part-time adult students, distinguish between two views of the student role regarding learning – reproductive and self-determining. Reproductive learners identified characteristics such as attending classes, doing assigned reading and working hard as being characteristic of the good student. Their view of the student is complemented by their view of the good lecturer, whose role it is to “present the body of material which was examinable [...] so that they had it in a convenient form for memorisation” (Kember *et al.*, 2003, p.244), as well as providing relevant examples that the students could apply to their workplace. They expect and request direction from their teachers as well as good handouts. Useful interaction in class for these students is seen as the lecturer providing answers to students' questions rather than discussions. Reproductive learners share similarities with both Entwistle and Ramsden's (1983) reproducing and achieving orientations though there are differences apparent when evaluation of the learning environment in relation to orientation is considered. Entwistle and Tait (1990, p.187) found that while the reproducing students, who take a surface approach to learning, prefer “situations which are thought to facilitate rote learning”, a clear preference for learning environments promoting either understanding or rote learning is not evident among students high in achieving orientation.

Students categorised as self-determining (Kember *et al.*, 2003; 2004) see the student as being someone who directs her/himself, is willing to take initiative, constructs their own learning and is self-responsible. They expect a more equal and interactive relationship with their lecturers and prefer discussion with both peers and lecturer to be part of class, although expository teaching is not rejected. Also important to them are their own

¹² Kember *et al.* note that the secondary educational system of Hong Kong where the research was conducted must be considered. The educational system is competitive and selective with didactic teaching methods and examinations as the primary form of assessment.

experiences and reflection on these experiences is valued. The self-determining student appears to share characteristics with Entwistle and Ramsden's (1983) meaning and achieving orientations, though it is the self-determining student only who shows a clear preference for learning situations perceived to promote understanding.

Howard and Baird (2000), in a study of class interaction involving both traditional and non-traditional¹³ students, investigated how students who contributed to class discussion and ask questions view the classroom situation, their responsibilities as learners and the responsibility of the lecturer. Similar to Kember *et al.*'s (2003; 2004) findings on self-determining students, the 'talkers' saw the student role as involving responsibility for their own learning and actively facilitating the learning process for both themselves and other students. While both 'talkers' and 'non-talkers' view the role of the lecturer as being knowledgeable about the subject matter and presenting it to the student in an understandable format, the 'talkers' do not view the lecturer as the expert on all aspects of content. They see themselves as able to contribute to the knowledge being gained. Howard and Baird (2000) report a significant difference between 'talkers' and 'non-talkers' with regard to their responsibility as students to pay attention in class and request help from the lecturer if required. Thus, while there is similarity between 'talkers' and self-determining students, 'non-talkers' and reproductive students differ indicating that the reasons behind participating in class differ. Rather than emphasising the influence of past educational experiences as Kember *et al.* (2003; 2004) do, Howard and Baird (2000) link the different views of the student and lecturer role to a consumerist view of education where the tutor is obliged to be active and the student can choose to be passive.

The literature indicates that while students' bring a prior student identity based on previous experiences and length of formal education that this is not straightforward and is affected by socio-historical views of education. While many studies refer to student anxiety about participation in third level education this needs to be looked at in light of students' estimates of their own abilities, their epistemological beliefs, and their initial view of their own and the lecturers' roles as variation is evident in research findings.

¹³ Howard and Baird define the non-traditional student as being aged over twenty years.

However as identity is not static but dynamically created in social contexts the initial perceptions, interpretations and identity of the adult student do change. Goffman (1961) refers to a period of secondary adjustment where the individuals become more confident and begin to 'bend the rules' and "manipulate the system to their advantage" (Merrill, 1999, p.132).

Changes

As students proceed through their educational programme changes in both student and personal identity are indicated. For example, increased confidence and assertiveness and questioning of the status quo have been found (e.g. O'Fathaigh and O'Sullivan, 1997; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Increasing criticality towards knowledge from different sources as well as greater tolerance of different people and viewpoints is also reported (Merrill, 1999; *Learning Journeys Report*, n.d.).

The verification of student identity through positive evaluation is likely to lead to the increased confidence reported. In addition students could be more integrated in the 'community of practice' of the college setting and be more familiar with the "vocabulary, jargon, routines and styles" (Sandars, 2004, p.112), being able to 'do' college appropriately. The value attached to educational qualifications in the broader social context is seen as a contributory factor (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). The personal satisfaction of acquiring knowledge and understanding (Baxter and Britton, 2001; Stevens, 2003; Moore, 2004) is also provided as an explanation. Behaviours learned and performed in the role of the student are found to transfer to other social contexts and identities, for example skills in expression (Stevens, 2003) and ability to discuss (*Learning Journeys Report*, n.d.), indicating that some aspects of student identity extend into other social identities. Mercer (2007, p.21) suggests that the academic knowledge gained through education leads to a "feeling of personal change and development" as academic knowledge pervades other aspects of an individual's life demonstrating the interaction between different identities and levels of identity. Other authors (e.g. Walters, 2000; Moore, 2004) also refer to evidence of

a more pervasive identity change in particular changes in self-efficacy, self-assurance and self-confidence. However conflict with other identities is also reported.

Conflict with Other Social Identities

As discussed in preceding chapters, the structural symbolic interactionist views conceives the person as being composed of multiple social identities as well as a more pervasive personal identity. Thus the experience of being a student and the identity formed is not only located within and constrained by the rules and organisation of the educational institution but also outside factors such as work and family (Merrill, 1999). Morrison (1992) suggests that there is an inherent notion of segmentation of time associated with part-time study that does not consider the amount of time given to other commitments. Shanahan (2000), from her phenomenological study of the experiences of five female mature students, found reports of conflict with and loss of other social identities, such as parent or friend. Similarly Leder and Forgasz's (2004) Australian participants report some conflict regarding time spent with partners and in work. Concern about the threat to time spent with their families has also been found (e.g. Uí Chasaide, 1997; Davies and Williams, 2001; Stevens, 2003). Merrill (1999, p.156) reports among her female participants frequent indications of "guilty mother syndrome" and difficulty in fitting in studying with the needs of their families. Conversely reports of being a positive role model for children and helping children learn are found (e.g. *Learning Journeys Report*, n.d.; Davies and Williams, 2001; Crossan *et al.*, 2003).

The questioning of other roles, identities and relationships is also found, in particular aspects of identities related to social class and gender (e.g. James, 1995; Lynch, 1997; Uí Chasaide, 1997; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Brine and Waller, 2004). The association of education with upward social mobility can cause conflict in relationships as well as affecting the student's disposition towards higher education. From research with community activists studying for a B.A. in Community Education a disposition towards higher education involving seeing "theory as academic 'jargon' irrelevant to the 'real' world" is proposed by Bamber and Tett (2000, p.68) as being based on students' own "negative perception of their own status in the social order".

One of the overt signs of education is a change in vocabulary, which is reported to result in mocking (Baxter and Britton, 2001; Stevens, 2003). Merrill (1999, p.183) reports a minority of her thirty male and female mature student participants experiencing a “social distance” from friends and family. Participants reported a lack of commonality in conversational topics and that friends and family felt threatened by their education. Lucey *et al.* (2003) suggest that for working class females, becoming educated involves differentiating oneself from one’s social background and thus has consequences for identity. Bainbridge (2005) found a common feature among his mature female students a desire to “improve the experience of those still linked to the pre-upwardly mobile past” (n.p.), which he interprets as a way of reconciling the guilt of leaving one’s social past through education.

As discussed in *Chapter 2*, the individual possesses many social identities from the various roles they occupy. The degree to which they identify with these roles is dependent on the continuity between pre-existing identities and the expectations of the roles as well as the extent to which they can modify social arrangements to achieve consistency (Stets and Burke, 2000). When social identities are divergent and cannot be reconciled the individual must make changes to his or her life, which itself can cause additional conflict.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed available interpretations of the role and identity of the student in the context of macro- and micro- social factors. Significant factors in the broader social environment of policies on mature student entry to higher education in Ireland and the economic costs of professional education in social care were considered.

Viewing the college setting as a community or activity system in which the student role and identity is constructed and reconstructed in relation to factors internal to the people involved and the setting was then discussed. The significance of a safe and supportive learning environment to encourage critical thinking and facilitate empowerment was first examined. Literature pertaining to teachers’ pedagogical beliefs about adult learners and students’ evaluation of effective teaching, as well as differences between the view of

knowledge and learning environment of college and the workplace was discussed in relation to their impact on student identity. Since assessment is seen to have a major influence on student identity and its salience this was examined. Before looking at prior learning experiences and their impact on the initial interpretation of the student role literature relating to the part played by student peers in constructing a student identity was explored. Finally, this chapter discussed documented changes in student identity, its interaction with other identities as well as conflict with these identities since identity is dynamic and the individual has multiple social identities displayed in different communities or systems.

In the next chapter the second social identity focused on in this study, professional identity will be discussed. Factors impinging on the social care practitioner identity such as the main counter role in the working environment as well as professional learning and education in social care will also be examined. The literature reviewed in *Chapter 4* relates to the second and third research questions.

Chapter 4

Professional Identity and Professional Education in Social Care

Overview of Chapter

Following on from the discussion of the student role and identity and how this is constructed in interaction with the structural factors in the college environment in the previous chapter, this chapter considers the other social identity that is the focus of this study – professional identity. The notion of professional identity and how it is constructed is outlined. This is followed by discussion of the impact of the state dependent nature of social care services in relation to the autonomy of the practitioner and the impact of this on the professional identity formed. The identity of the social care practitioner is considered in relation to that of the social worker, the main counter-role, as identities are seen to be formed in relation to counter roles in the social structure (Burke and Tully, 1977).

Then the concepts of professional education and learning are deliberated upon, with the differences between learning in the workplace and in college analysed. The knowledge base of social care education and how this fits with the needs of the workplace is discussed as conflict between what is valued in the college environment and the workplace affects both identity formation and the relationship between the social identities. Finally factors identified in the literature as affecting the transfer of learning and the transformation of workplace practices are considered.

Professional Identity

Schein (1978) sees professional identity as the principles, intentions, characteristics and experiences by which an individual defines him or herself in a professional role. Through acting in a particular role, which itself is impacted on by socio-structural norms (Ibarra, 1999), an individual learns about how s/he is expected to act and gradually conceptualises

her/himself in relation to these. Developing a professional identity involves the individual selectively acquiring “the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge” of the professional group of which they are a member (Clouder, 2003, p. 213) and occurs over time (Schein, 1978). It is a process of negotiation “by which people strive to improve the fit between themselves and their work environment” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765).

Daley’s (2000) study of professionals indicates that it is through daily interaction with colleagues that this image of oneself or identity is formed. She also proposes that interaction with fellow professionals creates allegiance to the profession (Daley, 2002). In a similar vein David and Victor (2002), drawing on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991; Wenger 1998) see the development of an occupational identity as a process of ‘learning to be’ within a particular community of practice. “We learn ‘how’ through practice; and through practice, we learn to be. In other words, practice shapes our dispositions and belief systems – our identity in a particular profession” (David and Victor, 2002, p.247). In this view, the learning an individual engages in at work cannot be separated from the occupational identity formed (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Billett and Somerville (1994, pp.310-311) argue also that occupational identity is “both shaped by, and shapes, individual identities, which directs intentional conscious thought, monitors existing learnt processes and mediates how individuals engage with social suggestion they encounter in and about work”, in line with structural symbolic interactionism, as discussed in *Chapter 2*. While these social and personal identities can be seen as being constructed by the social world they are taken on by individuals in particular ways for certain reasons (Leont’ev, 1981).

Thus, not only could it be argued that aspects of personal identity impact on the occupational identity formed by an individual but also as Bames *et al.* (2000) point out conflict between demands originating from the professional group and those from the practice setting affects individuals’ understanding of their role and hence the professional identity they develop. This in turn impacts on allegiance to a broader conception of the profession. As mentioned in *Chapter 1* the social care profession in Ireland is broad with practitioners working in a wide variety of settings with different client groups.

Another factor suggested to impinge on the professional identity of social care workers is their level of autonomy. Daley (2002) suggests that the level of independence or autonomy of professionals is affected the structure of the organisational system. She notes that nurses and social workers, who mainly work within a bureaucratic organisational system, have limitations on their autonomy and “indicate that to use new information in their practice they often have to find creative ways to go around organisational structure” (*ibid*, p. 85). Social care services in Ireland are state dependent to varying extents¹⁴, and consequently autonomy is constrained, fitting into Brante’s (1990) classification of welfare state professions. In these professions the values of the professional group are secondary to those of social welfare legislation, which limits the agency of individual professionals.

Hicks *et al.* (1998, p.372), in their discussion of residential child care in England, point out that the professional autonomy of the social care practitioner is “determined at both bureaucratic and practice levels”. They propose that the autonomy of the social care practitioner is constrained by the imbalance between the location of decision making power and the location of information; lack of control over “decisions about admissions and transfers of” clients and “the deployment and use of staff” (*ibid*, p.371). The findings of a survey of residential care managers in Scotland (n=87) support this with managers, particularly in the statutory sector, reporting little control over admissions (Milligan *et al.*, 2004). Heron and Chakrabarti (2002b) found that social care staff report factors such as the structure of residential care work, with decisions having to be checked out with management, spending time in trivial tasks rather than meaningful intervention with the young people, working in a team, lack of supervision and positive feedback all impinging on their autonomy in their professional role. This lack of autonomy is found to lead to feelings of being unable to achieve meaningful goals resulting in frustration and disillusionment and eventually burnout (Heron and Chakrabarti, 2002b; Colton and

¹⁴ Most residential child care services and community prevention services in Ireland are the responsibility of the government, either the remit of the Department of Health and Children, or Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Services, for which the Department of Health and Children are responsible, are run through the Health Services Executive (HSE). Children’s residential services not managed by the Health Services Executive are registered by them and so are inspected by them (*Social Services Inspectorate Annual Report 2004*). In the same way other social care services (for example older people, intellectual disability, sensory disabilities) are the responsibility of the HSE, whether actually managed by them or not.

Roberts, 2004 cited in Colton and Roberts, 2007). Also contributing to frustration, stress and burnout and impacting on professional identity, is the troubled and troublesome nature of young people with whom residential social care practitioners work. Heron and Chakrabarti (2002b) report practitioners feeling unable to effectively deal with the behaviour and meet the needs of the young people. Knorth *et al.* (2007) found practitioners suffering from feelings of fear, anger and impotence.

The literature suggests that professional or occupational identity is developed through interaction with one's colleagues while engaging in workplace practices though influenced by personal identity. The width of a profession, as in social care in Ireland, is proposed to affect a broader notion of professional identity, beyond individual workplaces. The autonomy of the social care practitioner is limited by the welfare state nature of the profession as legislation takes precedence over the values and work of the professional group, which is reported to contribute to frustration among practitioners. Another factor found to impact on the identity of the social care practitioner is their relationship with the social worker, the main counter role in the working environment.

Counter Roles

As discussed in *Chapter 1*, while social care work originated in residential child care in Ireland it not only has expanded beyond this area but also the boundaries between social care work and social work have become increasingly blurred (Farrelly and O'Doherty, 2005). As the role from which professional identity is formed is seen in opposition to possible counter-roles within the social structure (Stets and Burke, 2000), the relationship between social care work and social work as well as the nature of each impact on the identity of social care practitioners.

While there are similarities between social care work and social work with regard to being agents of society, working with groups as well as individual clients, using their relationship in their work and working as part of a team (Crimmens, 1998) differences exist, such as working within the client's living conditions and developing a therapeutic relationship. For example Anglin (1999, p.145) distinguishes child and youth work in Canada from other

social service professions as involving “the development of a therapeutic relationship” and “day-to-day work with children in their environment. Similarly Smith (2003) discussing the residential childcare worker, and Tuggener (1986, cited in Crimmens, 1998) discussing the social pedagogue, include caring within the clients’ daily environment as central. Davies-Jones (2000, n.p.) emphasises the “primary caring, ‘life-space’ counselling, group-work using the ‘living group’ and the utilisation of creative and aesthetic activities” as intervention tools. Milligan (1998, p.277) suggests that social work is based on an “‘advice, guidance and assistance’ model” of helping and object to degree level social care and social work education being common. He considers this to be a contributory factor to the lower status of residential social care work, claiming that “residential workers will never achieve parity of esteem while residential care is seen as a type of social work” (*ibid*, p.275).

Unlike Scotland, in Ireland, degree level education for social care work is separate from that for social work. However social care work education is located within the Institutes of Technology rather than the universities where social work education takes place. This is a factor seen as affecting the poorer public perception of social care work as the Institutes of Technology are often seen as inferior to the universities (Gallagher and O’Toole, 1999; Share and McElwee, 2005).

In addition the working relationship between social workers and social care practitioners is such that social workers are in a position of power over social care practitioners. For example, while the social care practitioner is the primary carer for a child in residential care, the child’s social worker is in a supervisory capacity with regard to the care of the child (*Social Services Inspectorate Annual Report*, 2004). In the U.K., Heron and Chakrabarti (2002a, pp.347-348) found that residential social care practitioners “felt their views were considered inferior by social workers because they were not qualified”. While a higher proportion of social care practitioners are qualified in Ireland compared to Scotland¹⁵, practice in social care work without a relevant qualification still occurs in

¹⁵ McFarlane and McLean (2003) estimated only 20% of social care practitioners in the U.K. possess formal qualifications. An audit in Scotland by Hunter *et al.* (2004) indicates that 30% of supervisors, 7.4% of managers and 16.4% of care workers held required qualifications.

Ireland but not with social work. Also the minimum recognised qualification level for social care practitioner is lower than that for social work¹⁶.

Thus the literature suggests both the status and education of social care workers compared to social workers is lower. As discussed in *Chapter 1*, social care workers have been employed without an accredited educational qualification so their initial learning is based entirely in the workplace. As will be discussed in the next section differences are noted with regard to learning through work practices and education based in educational institutions.

Professional Learning and Education

While Edwards (2005, p.51) notes that learning through participation in practice is more common in discussions of workplace learning she criticises the notion of learning solely through participation for not sufficiently dealing “with knowledge creation at the levels of both individuals and the systems in which they are operating”. Other arguments for a move away from an apprenticeship model of learning in the workplace to qualification driven vocational learning located in educational institutions centre on other the need for theoretical and conceptual frameworks, pedagogical practice and transformation. Occupational learning for transformation requires both horizontal (everyday) and vertical (theoretical) concepts so that knowledge that goes beyond the immediacy of the workplace is integrated (Guile and Young, 2002; Young, 2004). Guile (2006, p.256-257) argues that knowledge of theoretical concepts are necessary in occupational learning as “reposition us in relation to different fields of knowledge and to practice as well as offering possibilities for acting differently in relation to both of them”. Based on Billett’s (2004) proposition that the development of conceptual knowledge is difficult through purely informal learning in the workplace, Tennant (2000) justifies organised occupational learning in an institution of higher education. He argues that occupational or professional learning solely through

¹⁶ A B.A. (Hons) Social Studies/Social Work combining an academic social science degree with social work practice training (NFQ Level 8) or a two year postgraduate qualification (NFQ Level 9) after a B.A. (Hons) Social Science is required for social work (National Social Work Qualifications Board 2006) while the minimum qualification that is likely to be accepted for registration as a social care worker is a B.A. (Ord) (NFQ Level 7) although honours degrees (NFQ Level 8) are widely available. The National Framework of Qualifications is explained at www.nqai.ie.

workplace participation is inadequate, as it does not provide the practitioner with opportunities to grow and develop beyond the immediate workplace situation (Young, 2004), nor explain “pedagogic strategies required to assist learners to mediate between theory and practice” (Guile, 2006, p.266). Tennant (2000, p.132) critiques Lave and Wenger’s (1991) view of situated learning for not allowing for a possible separation between practice itself and reflection on that practice, claiming that in their position “[...] it is not possible or desirable to go beyond the ‘situation given’ and extract from experience that which is decontextualised, abstract or general”. Tennant (2000) also argues that Lave and Wenger’s (1991) analysis does not account for separating oneself from the community of practice and critiquing its accepted beliefs, thus for transformational learning to occur.

For transformational learning to occur and knowledge to transfer across settings, Billett and Somerville (2004, p.319) argue that many types of learning – “theoretical and practical, formal and informal, personal and social” need to be drawn upon. The issue is then one of how to facilitate such transformation through the acknowledgement of and transfer of knowledge and learning between settings or systems, while also taking account of the different interpretations of the two social roles and social identities involved. Factors in the college setting such as a safe learning environment in which students’ knowledge was acknowledged yet developed and enabling students to perform well as students were discussed in *Chapter 3*. In the following sections knowledge differences between the two social settings, the debate over the knowledge base of social care practice and factors in the workplace setting are examined.

Knowledge Differences

As discussed above and in *Chapter 3* there are considered to be differences between workplace learning and knowledge and that of formal educational settings. Symes and McIntyre (2000) in their discussion of the relationship between education and work refer to the distinction between explicit and tacit forms of knowing. The former can be “formulated and textualised” (p.3) and is associated with educational institutions while the latter cannot always be articulated and is “only ‘acquired on the job’, through coming into close ‘communion’ with its materials and tools, and gaining a deeper understanding of their

characteristics and nature” (p.4). Billett (2001, p.434) expresses a similar distinction and adds that knowledge learned through practice is more subject to idiosyncratic interpretations by individuals “premised on their personal histories or ontogenies”.

Disagreement and debate over the knowledge base of an occupation among practitioners and educators can also cause issues as this can contribute to confusion regarding the value of knowledge for practice and separation rather than integration of identities.

Knowledge Base of Social Care

Share and McElwee (2005) note that as social care training has developed in Ireland there has been a reduction in emphasis on concrete skills (e.g. meal preparation, health care) and an increase in emphasis on policy issues, theoretical knowledge and research, which has been criticised for not meeting the practice needs of the sector. This can be seen as reflecting a competence view of professional education. In the U.K. however the competence based model of education has been criticised as being inappropriate for both social work and social care work as it fails to account for changes inherent in the work, fragments the complex and interconnected activities of the work, focuses on individual competences when team work is essential for successful intervention (Lymbery *et al.*, 2000) and does not account for the creativity and situatedness of finding solutions to people’s problems (Lane, 2001). However Sargeant’s (2000, p.648) study of the impact of NVQs on knowledge and practice of social care workers found “a shift from mechanistic compliance with existing workplace practice to practice informed by awareness of an authoritative source of good practice that has legitimacy beyond the workplace”.

The knowledge base of social care education is derived from the social sciences and shared with other professional areas such as psychology and social work (Share and McElwee, 2005), and forms of nursing (Milligan, 2003). Hicks *et al.* (1998) suggest areas of knowledge required for residential child care, should include developmental, social and organisational psychology as well as anthropology. However there is variation evident regarding the origin of knowledge for social care education as well as the relevance of input from the social sciences.

On the one hand there are those that advocate the primacy of knowledge acquired from practice (Cervero, 1992). For example Smith (2005, p.265), discussing residential social care training in Scotland, complains that the knowledge relevant to the work, which should be “located within what goes on in the relationship established between children and youth and those working with them” is not done in training, instead “knowledge drawn from the social sciences is privileged”. Phelan (2005) argues, with regard to educational programmes for child and youth work in Canada, that there is a need to make greater use of knowledge generated within the occupation rather than relying on literature from fields such as psychology and special education as this “misrepresents the CYC field” and “diminishes [its] professional integrity” (p.349). Yet, besides advocating the use of self and self-understanding, he lists theories such as attachment theory, which originated in the field of developmental psychology, as being the basis of the curriculum. Milligan (2003), in his discussion of the development of a Diploma in Social Work for residential care in Scotland, acknowledges the centrality of developmental psychology to a theoretical basis for residential social care. Clough (2000, p.81) suggests that residential work requires four types of theories: theories that apply to residents’ lives; theories that examine the nature of residential work; theories of interventions and theories of the “structures and organisation” of residential homes, all of which could be argued to have their bases in psychology, sociology and social policy, though, as Clough notes, “theorists about residential care may have contributed to the development of the theories” (p.79). Cameron (2004, p.145) points out disciplines such as sociology, psychology and health sciences act as “theoretical support for social pedagogy” enabling the social care practitioner to respond to behaviour based on not only observation but understanding of the young person’s situation and needs. In her discussion of social pedagogy in Denmark and Germany, Cameron (2004, p.145) deduces from participants’ responses, that central to a pedagogic approach in working with young people is to “accept a multiplicity of possible perspectives, depending on personal circumstances, particular dynamics and events and sources of support”. This fits with Quicke’s (2000, p.304) concept of professional knowledge. He questions the view that professional expert knowledge is something that is unchanging and can be accumulated, suggesting that in contemporary society, “awareness of the fallibility and provisionality of

formal knowledge and of the importance of connecting with local knowledge in an increasingly diverse cultural world” is required. Similarly Queeny (2000) suggests that professional education should help participants develop abilities of reflection, judging and integrating information. Lynton (1990 p.13) presents the view, that in many areas of professional practice, “problems are not well defined, and [...] there exists in most situations a variety of options, each involving trade-offs among competing goals and values.” Lynton’s view is resonated in discussions of health and social care professions (e.g. Parton, 2003; Yelder, 2004) where professional practice is presented as being complex and ambiguous, requiring practitioner skills of critical thinking and reflection. However Tennant (2000) proposes that successful learning from workplace experience and relating theoretical material to experiences requires the ability to analyse workplace experiences. In addition, to assist students in developing skills of critical reflection the teacher needs to be more than just knowledgeable about content (*ibid*). This raises the issue of the background of social care educators in a young profession where the curricula involve a large amount of content from the social sciences.

Thus not only do social care practitioners work in a wide variety of different settings there is variation in regarding what knowledge is relevant for social care practice across the sector which will inevitably impact on students’ judgements of what is relevant to their work practices in line with both their learner and occupational identities. In the next section factors in the workplace setting are considered.

Social Care Practice as an Activity System

Billett (2001) argues that the use of knowledge in the workplace is based on situational factors within a particular work setting. The workplace can be viewed as an activity system with its particular artefacts, rules, roles and division of labour (Engeström, 1993) that determine how work practice and activity are enacted. Williams and Wake (2007) argue, in their exploration of contradictions between workplace and college mathematics, that mathematics activity in each setting is inextricably connected with their social practices. In the workplace mathematics is rooted in the practices and culture so may not be recognised as mathematics. In a similar vein in social care work theoretical concepts underpinning

practice may not be recognised as such. Williams and Wake (2007, p. 323) suggest that concepts become embedded within the semiotic tools of the workplace setting, only making “practical sense in [its] context of activity” in that communal setting.

Also if different workplaces are viewed as having their own idiosyncratic rules and practices, customary practice in one work setting may be considered inappropriate in another because of differences in goals and procedures (Billett, 2001). This raises issues for the professional education of social care practitioners, due to the variety of work settings, as previously mentioned.

Since behaviour within the activity system is also influenced by mental models held by subjects (Sandars, 2005) the belief systems of other practitioners in the work setting regarding the value and relevance of programmes of social care education also impacts. Ottoson (2000) and Daley (2002, p. 82) suggest that in professional education what participants choose to learn, or the level at which they learn it, is affected by both their level of autonomy and the workplace culture, in particular whether others in their professional community “sanction, support and affirm the learning as important in the professional role” and accept or reject the practitioner’s new knowledge. Also relevant is the beliefs about the relationship between theory and practice. For example, Eraut (2003) distinguishes between theory being “regarded as a direct guide to action” (p.62) versus theory being considered to be an intellectual resource “that aids one’s understanding of a context or an issue” (pp.61-62). He points out that the transfer of theoretical knowledge when the former view of theory is held is more likely to be problematic and require “confirming evidence in the new professional context” (p.62). In the next section how the knowledge from the college setting becomes used and embedded in the workplace setting is considered.

Learning Transfer

According to Billett, (2010), individuals’ identities and goals both direct their participation in and their learning from workplace experiences. The self has intentionality that drives it to learn from experiences. In turn these experiences can transform the self (Billett and

Somerville, 2004). Thus how individuals interpret the roles of the social care practitioner and student and the social identities derived from these will not only guide their learning in college but also application of this learning in the workplace. So depending on their motivations there is an expectation that students will take bits from the college curriculum that suit their needs in the workplace at the time. Beach (2003), using his (1995) study of Nepali shopkeepers attending adult education classes in mathematics as an example points out that the knowledge that is seen as useful is taken and transformed in line with practice. He found that “shopkeepers used the adult education classes to supplement their already existing repertoire of arithmetic strategies with written column algorithms”. The shopkeepers did not use and quickly forgot “arithmetic operations signs upon completing the class. The reason for this was that operations signs are not needed for column algorithms when the practices within the activity make explicit what needs to be done with the numbers” (*ibid*, p.49)

The successful completion of a course of professional education does not necessarily mean that the knowledge gained will be used in the workplace. As outlined in *Chapter 3* students come to the educational process with different learning identities and views of the role of the student part of which is the approach they take to learning. While this can change it is dependent on factors within the college community and other communities in which the individual is involved, as discussed in *Chapter 3*. Wertsch (1988 cited in Billett, 2010) makes the important distinction between mastery and appropriation.

Mastery is viewed as a superficial form of learning that individuals engage in when subject to socially-derived demands and expectations. They may not believe in, or even understand, the purpose of the knowledge they have acquired, but can reproduce it for required performance. Appropriation, on the other hand, is learning that is more wholeheartedly adopted and engaged in.

(Billett, 2010, p. 43)

On the other hand, knowledge that the student practitioner brings from college to the workplace can cause contradictions within the activity system of the workplace and lead to expansive learning (Engeström, 2001) and the transformation of practice within that system. Some of Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's (2006) participants said that their employers listened to suggestions for practice changes because of the status of the university course in Community Care Practice they were doing. However, frustration with work practices due to higher expectations has been reported in studies of social care education (Karban and Frost, 1998; Vatcher and Coles, 2004).

Beach (2003, p. 42) uses the concept of transition to "understand how knowledge is generalised, or propagated, across social space and time". "A transition is consequential when it is consciously reflected on, struggled with" (*ibid*), and engages identities. Thus when the identities of social care practitioner and student are more integrated practice is more likely to be transformed. This suggests that social identities are not overly threatened in either setting and opportunities for reflection are provided. Eraut (1994) suggests that professionals require designated time to reflect on practice for them to learn from it and for it to contribute to their professional knowledge. Studies indicate this is not facilitated in social care practice. For example Smith (2005, p.268) notes incongruity within residential child care between the importance of reflection and professional judgment and the structures within which the practitioner must work, where "management push a competency and best practice agenda". Social care practitioners themselves have reported not seeing the purpose of "thinking about doing" (Eisikovits and Beker, 2001, p.430) and a lack of facilitation of reflection through an absence of formal supervision (Heron and Chakrabarti, 2002b). Even when studying for a qualification in social care students report time, insufficient resources and workload as factors which prevent them reflecting on knowledge and using it in practice (Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou, 2006). The model of education used can also affect participants' use of reflection. For example, Nikolou-Walker (2007), in a study of work-based learning within the police service in Northern Ireland, advocates the use of an experiential, group-based and learner-directed model of education with assessment based in work practices, to enable reflection. On the other hand research findings in relation to the impact of programmes of social care

education have reported that the college setting encourages and provides opportunities for reflection. Vatcher and Cole (2004) report that their participants valued the separation of their educational programme from the workplace as it enabled reflection on practice. Karban and Frost's (1998, p. 291) study of thirty experienced residential care workers undertaking a Diploma in Social Work identified outcomes such as being able "to situate issues in a wider context" and "reflect on skills" as well as more direct application of knowledge to practice ("implementation of anti-discriminatory practice").

However because theoretical knowledge becomes embedded in practice and practice becomes automated (Williams and Wake, 2007) and "abstracted knowledge" is transformed in its application (Billett, 2001, p.447) the question of whether practitioners can separate and articulate the impact of college learning is raised.

Conclusion

In this chapter the concept of professional identity and factors affecting its construction, such as acting and learning in a particular role in interaction with others and fitting in with pre-existing identities was examined. Professional identity was found to be impacted on by the breadth of the profession, differences between professional work settings as well as the level of autonomy of both the individual practitioner and the profession. In relation to social care the autonomy of professional is affected by its requirement to both adhere to social welfare legislation and its legal and educational standing in relation to the main counter role in the social structure, social workers. Particularly relevant for this study as the participants are all existing social care practitioners is the nature of and differences between learning in the workplace and in educational institutions. Occupational learning solely through participation in workplace practices was analysed and found to be inadequate. However, the contribution of formal education located in educational institutions carries with it problems about differences in the nature of knowledge inherent in its practices compared to that of the workplace. Specific to social care education are disagreements surrounding an appropriate knowledge base and educational model, and thus curriculum for social care education. Then, social care practice is examined as an activity system and documented differences between this activity system and that of a formal educational

setting are highlighted in relation to their impact on the transfer of learning from the latter to the former.

The next chapter outlines the methodology and research design for the study.

Chapter 5

Methodology and Research Design

Overview of Chapter

In this chapter the methodological approach which informs data collection and analysis is discussed in relation to its suitability to the theoretical framework of identity used, the aim of the research and research questions. The choice of methods, sampling strategy, and data collection methods are then explained as well as how the data was analysed. Finally the role of the researcher and the validity and reliability of the research are discussed, along with ethical considerations and dilemmas.

Methodological Approach

As the aim of the research was to explore how participants interpret the roles of student and social care practitioner, construct identities from these interpretations as well as the interaction between identities formed from these roles, the data generated needed to focus on how participants describe, interpret and understand the meanings of the experience of being students and social care practitioners, within macro- and micro-social contexts. A qualitative approach is taken as it “implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’” (Sherman and Webb, 1988, p.7) and allows me to “develop an understanding of how the world is constructed” for participants (McLeod, 2001, p.2).

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and the literature reviewed on adult learners indicate that the interpretations and constructions of the role and identity of student differ among individuals and change throughout the process of education. Also both the theoretical framework and literature on professional identity and professional education suggest that there will be variation between people regarding their interpretation of their professional role, the identity formed and the impact of professional education. As symbolic interactionism proposes that “people actively construct their world “through talk [...], through action, through systems of meaning, through memory,” (McLeod, 2001, p.2),

a methodology that generated verbal rather than quantifiable data is appropriate in terms of the theoretical framework and the research questions. Merrill (1999, p.47) cites Weil (1989), in arguing for the suitability of a qualitative approach to research for understanding the “lived experience” of adult learners as it “does not pre-define the nature of learning and adult learners’ experiences.” A qualitative approach thus has “the capacity to enrich and to re-define – theory and practice related to adults learning” (Weil, 1989 p.18 cited in Merrill, 1999 pp.47-48) as well as opening up “new possibilities for understanding” (McLeod, 2001 p.4) “feeding into a dialogue between practitioners and researchers.” (*ibid*, p.5).

Qualitative methodological approaches are based on a relativist epistemology, which acknowledges that “the ‘findings’ being reported are reflexively contextualised and comprise *a* truth rather than *the* truth” (McLeod, 2001 p.38). My role as researcher and effect on the research process from the selection of a topic (Parker, 1994), to writing up the research is central. Indeed it could be said that “data does not speak for itself but only through the interpreter” (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.324).

Choice of Methods

“The data of qualitative inquiry is most often people’s words and actions, and thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behaviour” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994 p.46). Although interviews were the primary source of data, the decision to use a variety of methods was made not only to enable triangulation of data but also to collect “whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.1).

Since the aim of the research was to explore the participants’ construction and interpretation of their social identities of student and worker and the interaction between these, a natural choice of data collection method was semi-structured individual interviews. Kleinman *et al.* (1994) suggest that interviews are a suitable method to permit a researcher to explore how people adapt or maintain an identity when faced with new experiences. Interviews provide a way of exploring how participants define their experiences and interpret them (Murphy *et al.*, 1998), as participants are seen as experiencing individuals

who actively interpret and construct events (Silverman, 1993). Although, as in all conversations, interviews can be limited by the participants' willingness and ability to articulate these experiences the relative informality of a semi-structured format allows the development of trust, adaptation of wording and probing the responses of participants. One of the advantages of this semi-structured format was seen as its flexibility, enabling the adaptation of questions to the responses of the interviewee and to "document perspectives not usually represented (or even envisaged by researchers)" (Burman, 1994, p. 51).

A series of interviews rather than a once-off interview was chosen because constructing identity is an enduring process (Pollard, 2003). As Wilson (1997, p. 364) points out, being a mature student is a continuous process and "thinking about the experience of being a mature student does not mean having a unified system of beliefs which tell them how to react, feel and think". Using multiple interviews also provide the "opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information" (Reinharz, 1992, p.37 quoted in Merrill, 1999, p.51). The participants' concerns and experiences changed as the course progressed. Also as an interviewer I felt more comfortable in challenging views and presenting interpretations to participants as the series of interviews progressed and a relationship developed with participants. In addition the use of multiple interviews allowed the development of trust between interviewer and interviewee and assisted transparency (Ball, 1990), resulting in less concern on the part of the participant "to present self as a competent member of the community" (Murphy *et al.*, 1998, p. 121), in this case a competent student and social care practitioner.

Interviews are recognised as interactive processes in which participants and researcher construct individual and collective subjectivities (Rapley, 2001). While the primary aim of my research was to understand the participants' interpretation of roles and identities it has to be accepted that a particular situational identity was being negotiated and portrayed to me as both lecturer and researcher. Hammersley (2003, p.123) argues "the fact that they (interviews) are artful productions, that they will often be shaped by concerns about self-presentation or persuasion" does not necessarily invalidate the data collected. The approach taken in this study is that the data generated by interviewing, while affected by the context

and perceptions of the interviewer, was representative of the participants' reality, what Melia (1997) referred to as a participant's 'plausible story'.

Since I was in a position to conduct observations in the classroom setting a series of observations were used to supplement and provide a focus for interviews. Observations were unstructured and focused on the behaviour and interaction of participants during class with the aim of generating additional data to supplement and compare with that from the interviews. As discussed in *Chapter 3*, the behaviour of students during classes, in particular their tendency to ask questions and participate in class discussion, can be indicative of students' interpretation of their role of students (Howard and Baird, 2000; Kember *et al.*, 2003; 2004). While Silverman (1993) argues that it is difficult to study the meaning of observed actions because of the ambiguity of human action, the intention behind using observation as a data collection method was to supplement data obtained through other methods. Although the notes made were brief these were useful in validating or contradicting data obtained from interviews and gaining a fuller picture of participants through seeing them in a situation besides the interviews.

The aim behind collecting data through participant diaries was to generate an additional source of information between interviews, to generate topics that could be further explored during interviews and to provide a way of methodological triangulation. (Patton, 1987; Cutcliffe and McKenna, 1999).

Research Design

Participant Selection

Participants were selected from the intake of first year students from a three year part-time B.A. (Ord.) in Social Care Practice. These students were practitioners who have experience in a social care practice setting and continue to work while doing the course.

Initial contact was made with participants in September 2004 during a three-day induction seminar. I facilitated a two hour workshop on *Being a Mature Student* on the second day and the research was introduced to potential participants at the end of this session. Potential

participants were made aware that I was also their developmental psychology lecturer. As is common with qualitative research the sampling method was purposive. It was a volunteer sample (Seale and Filmer, 1998) and purposive in that selection was made from a group who fulfilled the eligibility criterion of commencing a course in higher education related to their work (Silverman, 2005). Thirty-three participants completed the first stage of data collection, the questionnaire. Of these thirty-three, twenty students (54% of the group) expressed interest in taking further part in the research but due to students later withdrawing for a variety of reasons, the final sample size is fifteen.

Six of the fifteen participants are male and nine female. In the class group 30% were male and 70% female, so there was a larger representation of males in the sample. The age range at the commencement of my study, was from 22 to 50 years, with a mean of 35.5 years (SD = 7.2 years). Experience in social care ranged from 2 to 15 years, with a mean of 7.2 years (SD = 4.8 years). Thirteen participants had prior educational qualifications either from secondary school (Junior or Leaving Certificate; GCSE or A Level) and/or post-compulsory education (Certificate or Diploma). One participant had an honours B.A. Two participants had no educational qualifications.

All students who expressed interest in participating in the research were given a participant consent form to sign, asked to take it away with them and return it signed if they decided to participate. Potential participants were told that they would be interviewed three times throughout the academic year and asked to keep a diary of their experiences and feelings as they progressed through the course.

Collection of Data

Questionnaire

During the induction period the students were asked to complete a short open-ended questionnaire with the following questions:

- How would you describe your past experiences of education?
- Why are you doing this course?
- What are you most looking forward to about the course?

- What are you least looking forward to?
- Where do you think you can get help if you need it?
- How do you think the course will affect the rest of your life?

Students were informed that they could complete these questionnaires anonymously if they did not want to or hadn't decided whether they wanted to take further part in the research. Self-completion questionnaires were chosen for the first stage of data collection as a convenient way of encouraging students to reflect on the process of returning to education and generating topics that could be further explored during interviews. It also allowed access to a larger sample than was possible to interview. The specific questions relate to the initial aim and research questions as outlined in *Chapter 1* and were intended to:

- Obtain some indication of influences from past educational experiences that may affect participants' orientation to this new experience. As discussed previously, the influence of past learning experiences affect the identity a student forms in a new situation so information regarding past identity as a learner was considered important;
- Ascertain whether the primary motivation was described by participants as internal or external, in the context of the drive for professionalisation within social care, which again could affect orientation towards the course and the identity formed;
- Discover what participants perceived as positive and negative aspects of being involved in this educational experience, indicating how they initially viewed the role of the student;
- Gauge awareness of possible sources of support in relation to structural factors which the participant sees as being supportive;
- Gauge levels of initial reflection on how participation in the course could impact on their lives and thus identities.

Interviews

First interviews were conducted during November and December 2004. When mutually convenient dates were being organised for these interviews the participants were given a list of the topics to be discussed. These were:

- Managing other commitments – to explore role conflicts and salience of the student identity;
- Work-college relationship – to explore the extent to which and how the identities of student and social care practitioner interacted;
- Relationship with work colleagues, family and friends since starting the course – to explore any changes in social care practitioner identity and role conflicts;
- What was found to be enjoyable about the course – to explore the role of the student and student identity;
- What was found to be difficult about the course - to explore the role of the student and student identity;
- Sources of support and help – to explore how structural factors helped or impinged on the role and identity as student;
- Changing feelings about self and work since starting the course – to explore identity and changes in identity.

While these topics were generated from the literature (e.g. Morrison, 1992; Davies and Williams, 2001; Gallacher *et al.*, 2001; Warmingon, 2002) and guided by the research questions I was aware that they could and did change to some extent due to individuals' concerns. Though additional topics were explored throughout the interviews I maintained control to the extent of ensuring that the topics I wanted covered were included. As Dingwall (1997) notes, an interview, however informal, is not the same as a conversation as the interviewer has defined what will be spoken about.

Participants were informed that the interview would take approximately one hour but in reality they varied from thirty minutes to one hour thirty minutes. The participant decided the location for the interview, the only criterion being that it would be quiet enough to allow audio-taping. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, workplaces and in the college.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were returned to participants for comment and the opportunity to delete anything they did not want included

in the analysis. In addition to helping ensure respondent validation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the participants' reading of the transcripts was considered helpful in using prior interviews in forming the basis for further discussion, a strategy used by West (1995). Merrill (1999, p. 52) found in her study of women's experiences in higher education, that this strategy was useful in creating a "less exploitative" relationship between interviewer and participant as well as permitting continuity between interviews". Participants did not request any deletions from transcripts. However it was evident during interviews that participants had read transcripts of previous interviews. Participants were also offered a copy of the audiotape or voice file subsequent to transcription but none of the participants availed themselves of this offer.

Second interviews with participants were conducted during February and March 2005. These were mainly based on further exploration of topics generated in the first interview. The additional topics of preparing for and receiving grades and feedback on assignments were added as students now had this experience. Assessment and grading has been reported to impact on identity (e.g. James, 1995; Davies and Williams, 2001). Again topics to be covered were given to the participants prior to the interview. One participant requested that she would prefer to conduct the second and third interviews through e-mail so this was done.

Third interviews were conducted between July and September 2005, prior to the beginning of the participants' second academic year. Again topics for discussion were generated from preceding interviews. In this interview the development of a distinction between qualified and unqualified staff was introduced to explore the impact of the course on interpretation of the social care practitioner role and identity.

During the summer of 2006, after they completed the second year of the course, participants were asked to take part in a fourth interview and nine interviews were conducted. In addition to further exploration of their experiences of studenthood, professionalism and professionalisation in social care was discussed to explore how participants viewed this as affecting their role and identity as social care practitioners.

Dependent on the stage of the academic year during which the interviews were conducted discussion arose around various participants' concerns, what Denscombe (1998, p.127) refers to "issues of the moment". Some participants also used interviews as fora in which they could clarify matters such as approaches to essay writing and referencing. These were considered to be due to the dual role of researcher and lecturer and freely discussed.

Diaries

Although four participants gave me diary entries during the first month of the academic year only one participant kept a diary until the end for the first year. In addition he e-mailed accounts of experiences and feelings on these. Another participant initially kept a diary and then e-mailed me with her thoughts and feelings throughout the academic year. Though limited, the diaries did provide a useful source of additional information about the experiences of these participants.

Observation

Notes were taken after each of the sixteen psychology classes. Due to the difficulty of facilitating a psychology class and observing students these are brief. As Lapadat *et al.* (2005, p. 13) point out: "A classroom is a seductive setting – it draws all of the people in it into interacting in the moment". However seating arrangements, development of groups, interaction of participants and class participation were noted.

Analysis

In common with Cocklin (1996, n.p.) "the process of analysis became one of the central dilemmas for my study involving a prolonged exploration of a number of alternatives." Though influenced by literature recommending various approaches (e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1984; Lamnek, 1989 in Sarantakos, 1993) the process of analysis was largely guided by the research questions. Data collected was examined for themes that related to participants' interpretations of the role of the student and the role of the social care practitioner and how the individual participants positioned themselves in relation to these, to gain insight into their identities. The participants' perceptions and interpretation of

aspects of the college and work environments and the stated effects of these on them were identified as structural factors influencing the identities. Features that appeared to be important to participants in defining the self and part of both social identities were identified as being aspects of personal identity rather than specific to particular social identities.

Analysis and data collection proceeded together with each interview being transcribed and examined for themes relating to participants' interpretations roles, identities and influence of structural factors. Since the aim of the research was to develop understanding of the interpretation and construction of being a student and social care practitioner for participants this involved "immersion in the meaning-systems of research participants, through interviewing and reading and re-reading transcripts" (McLeod, 2001, p.191) and examining my reaction to what participants said in an attempt to present a picture of participants' viewpoints. Initial interpretations were checked with participants at subsequent interviews and used as a basis for examining continuity and change.

As data collection progressed similarities and differences in how participants' described themselves in relation to these roles were noted and factors that impacted on these changes were explored. Comparisons between participants' accounts and the literature were made continuously.

When all the data was collected and transcribed a 'story' was written for each participant in tabular form to illuminate individual interpretation of the roles of student and social care practitioner and identities in relation to these roles, as well as changes in identities and the salience of identities. Cross comparison between participants was then made.

Researcher Role

Hellawell (2006) suggests that the concept of insider/outsider positions in research be viewed along several dimensions rather than a single continuum, which resonates with my experience. Being a staff member in the setting in which the research is conducted indicated an insider perspective due to familiarity with the mores of the setting. However

my lack of direct experience in social care practice positioned me as an outsider. This appeared to serve as an equalising factor during interviews allowing participants to be the 'experts' through their greater knowledge of the day to day realities of practice.

Though my own experience of being an adult student did allow for identification with the feelings and concerns of participants, particularly in relation to time management and role conflicts, my educational background is dissimilar to many of my participants as my undergraduate degree was completed as a 'traditional' student. However, sharing my own experiences and fears helped develop a rapport (Madill *et al.*, 2000) during interviews.

Ethical Procedures and Dilemmas

Permission was first obtained from the Head of Department in which the research was conducted to approach students to take part in the research.

Cohen *et al.* (2000) state that the principle of informed consent in social research consists of four elements – competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension.

Competence

All participants were over the age of eighteen and considered to be responsible and mature and thus capable of giving informed consent.

Voluntarism

As stated earlier the sample was a volunteer one where potential participants were informed of the aims of the research and invited to take part. Prior to inviting potential participants to take part in my research they were told that I would also be one of their lecturers and therefore would be responsible for grading course work. As discussed below this did cause some ethical dilemmas for me.

Full Information

When seeking participants the group were told that the aim of the research was to explore their experiences and views on being an adult student and social care practitioner and how

this changed or not over the first year of their course. Participants were told that the research was part of a doctorate in education and thus supervisors and examiners could have access to data. The possibility of parts of the research being published in academic journals or presented at conferences was also discussed. Participants were told that any information given during the research would not be shared with any other people without their specific permission and was not. During some interviews participants did make suggestions on how they felt the course could be improved and their specific permission to bring this information to the Course Committee was requested before it was shared.

While participants were assured that their names would be changed, the possibility of identification of individuals due to the small size of the sample and the location of the research was discussed with them. The participants' right to withdraw from the research without explanation was explained. Indeed when requesting permission to conduct a fourth interview six participants did not respond and were not followed up.

The topics to be covered during interviews were given to participants at least a week before each interview and they were told that they were not obliged to talk about any issues they did not want to. As stated previously, participants were asked to select the location of the interviews to ensure that they would feel comfortable. All interview transcripts were returned to participants for comments and the removal of any part they did not wish to be used. The end of Year 1 report was given to participants for comment. Participants will also be offered a copy of the final thesis.

As mentioned previously, the inevitability of interviews being used as fora in which academic issues could be clarified by participants was accepted. Similarity in age however led to more personal discussions on occasion with some participants. As Merrill (1999, p.60) suggests "during the course of an interview the researcher is likely to find her/himself undertaking multiple roles; as a researcher, counsellor, advisor or friend." Although I had not expected a clear delineation of my roles as lecturer and researcher (Orland-Barak, 2002) some disquiet arose for me regarding participants receiving more guidance on academic

writing than their classmates so I approached the group tutors and academic writing skills sessions were offered to the entire group.

Comprehension

All details were explained to participants in language they understood and were reiterated during the data collection process.

Participant Feedback

Cohen *et al.* (2000) also suggest that the benefits of taking part in research are discussed with participants. While this was not done, some participants expressed enjoyment taking part in the research, finding both the interviews and their own reflection prior to the interviews a useful learning tool. Merrill (1999) also reports that her mature student participants found taking part in her research of value for reflecting on their lives.

Ethical Dilemmas

Prior to approaching potential participants and during data collection I was concerned about the effect of also being a lecturer and assessor to these students, therefore being in a position to determine to some extent their success on the course. This was overcome by ensuring transparency in grading and providing extensive feedback for course work as well as encouraging students to question and challenge grades. I was conscious during interviewing to maintain as much as possible a relationship of equality with regard to exchanging viewpoints and to offer my personal and professional opinion, if requested, what Seale (1998) refers to as a feminist methodology. My style of interaction with adult students has always been one of encouraging discussion, challenging of viewpoints and sharing of experiences, which I feel facilitated the dual role more successfully than had I used a more didactic style. There were also advantages to being one of the participants' lecturers in that when talking about learning and relevance to the workplace participants were encouraged to use examples from my class and subject to illustrate points made, if they didn't wish to speak about other lecturers.

Later concerns of identification with students' lives caused some unease particularly when students sought extensions on submission of assignments. Some participants could have been trying to use the relationship and my greater knowledge of their personal circumstances to obtain favours. As Fontana and Frey (1994) point out close rapport with participants has its problems. Such requests were dealt with by refusing to give extensions personally and referring students who requested extensions on submission of assignments for my subject to the group tutors.

Personal dilemma and feelings of disloyalty arose during interviews when students disparaged my colleagues' abilities as lecturers or compared their own abilities to those of fellow students. Seale (1998, p. 213) notes that "interviews are also moral arenas, in which the speaker's own reputation is displayed, sometimes by contrasting this with the incompetence or poor behaviour of other people." Also irritation was felt, from my position as a staff member, when some participants complained about what I interpreted to be minor inconveniences in the organisation of their course. On these occasions I accepted the participants' views as real to them and explored how this perceived behaviour affected them, only challenging by sometimes asking them to elaborate on their view of individuals' roles. My tactic was of "refrain[ing] from direct or overt affiliation with (or disaffiliation from) the expressed statements of [interviewees]" (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991, p.114 cited in Rapley, 2001, p.316).

Validity and Reliability

It should be stated at the outset that there is no sure way of assuring validity but that there are only 'notions of validity' [...] we are dealing with people's constructions of the world and the researcher is trying to capture this.

(Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.324)

As stated previously, the aim of my research is to explore the interpretation and construction of the roles and identities of student and social care practitioner in a group of adult students. Data was collected in only one site and from participants drawn from one

class group. Thus the question of whether similar findings can be found elsewhere is debatable, as the social structures of the institution and department impact on the identity constructed by participants. However the accuracy of data is enhanced by the use of multiple methods of data collection (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as well as the data being collected over a period of time. Commonality is found with the experiences and constructions of these students and those reported in existing literature, which according to Bird *et al.* (1996) increases the validity of findings. Thus on the one hand it is not unreasonable to assume that similar findings can be discovered elsewhere, what Bassey (2001) refers to as 'fuzzy generalisation'. On the other hand the dynamic and changing nature of identity constructed in relation to specific social structures and practices must be considered. Similarity regarding concerns and difficulties has also been found with later class groups.

Conclusion

An interpretative methodological approach was taken to fulfil the aim of exploring the student and social care practitioner, identities and structural factors that influence these, in students during their first year of a work-related degree course. Students were invited to participate at the beginning of their first academic year. The final sample size was fifteen. These participants varied with regard to age, commitments, prior educational qualifications and experience in social care. Although multiple methods of data collection were used data was primarily obtained through a series of three guided interviews conducted during the first and second semester and at the end of the academic year and a fourth interview with nine participants at the end of the second academic year. This longitudinal design is beneficial as it allows for the development of trust between participant and researcher thus combating concerns with self-presentation and leading to more candid discussion. The dual role of researcher and lecturer to participants was advantageous also in building rapport and transparency. However it did cause feelings of disloyalty towards colleagues on occasion.

The process of taking part in the research itself became a source of support to some participants. Also some participants reported that their involvement in the research led to greater reflection on the college experience. Rather than being seen as contaminating data

collection these factors should be seen as being representative of the impossibility of not allowing for researcher effects (Parker, 1994).

In the next chapter the findings of this study will be discussed.

Chapter 6

Discussion of Findings

Overview of Chapter

In this chapter the main findings from my study are presented and discussed in relation to existing literature. The presentation of data is organised around the three research questions, although discussion is included about some of the structural factors that are found to influence role interpretation and thus identity formed.

- How is the role of the student interpreted and what structural factors impact on it?
- How is the role of the social care practitioner interpreted?
- How do student identity and social care practitioner identity interact?

The second research question is discussed first.

Interpretation Role of Social Care Worker

Definitions of social care work include notions of care, support, protection and advocacy (Joint Committee on Social Care Professionals, 2003; Share and McElwee, 2005). In residential settings social care work involves caring for and building relationships with clients in their living conditions and using everyday activities as therapeutic interventions (Anglin, 1999; Davies-Jones, 2000; Smith, 2003). Shared characteristics are apparent in participants' accounts of their concept of social care work mirroring those mentioned in the literature.

Advocacy

Being an advocate for clients through helping them access services and information is prevalent in participants' accounts, particularly taking account of the clients' views, as noted by Lorenz (1994). For example when asked what being a professional social care worker meant to them one participant responded:

I see that I'm there to speak for the children who can't speak for themselves. [...] I have a responsibility as a professional to speak for the children after finding out what they want. To put them in touch with the people who can do what they want.

Darren I.4¹⁷

Another participant said:

People know they can come to me and will get respect and will get support around using the information, whatever training they need. And I think being a professional is also about shutting up sometimes, listening to what people want instead of being full of your own crap. [...] You can't always give people what they want but you can consider it and be aware of it.

Laura I.4

Living Environment

For those working in residential care settings a holistic approach to care is evident, including providing a comfortable living space of the clients, which involves doing domestic chores also:

You're supposed to give the children a pleasant environment. And to keep a home that you would live in yourself.

Darren I.4

I think everything has to work. I always had this belief, the garden, maybe they don't give a tinker's curse that everything died tomorrow but they see you working at it. [...] It is showing that somebody cares. And somebody is putting something into this house.

Matthew I.4

¹⁷*I.4* indicates that the quote is taken from the fourth interview with the participant. In a similar way *I.1* indicates the first interview, *I.2*, the second and *I.3* the third interview.

Partaking in Activities

Using activities as an opportunity for intervention and esteem building, as suggested by Davies-Jones (2000) is found. When asked about work practices, participants mentioned how they used their own interests as a way of teaching social skills:

I've an interest in gardening. We have a little garden at the house. And he [client] has taken a big interest in that and we kind of talk and chat about that. And fight and argue about what should go in and what shouldn't go in. His social skills would be very poor. His negotiating skills. I try and negotiate I don't think that's very nice there. I try to get him to negotiate and say well actually I do think it is nice there.

Matthew I.3

And emphasised the importance of activities, for example:

I've always acknowledged that it doesn't matter to me if it's sport or if it's art but let it be something. Kids need something else other than their day-to-day thing and they need to be reinforced positively somewhere along the way.

Gerard I.3

Association with Parenting

While it is acknowledged that caring for "other people's emotionally unsettled, if not disturbed and unhappy children" (*Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report*, 1970 p.13) is a more complex undertaking than parenting the organisation of residential homes for children is similar to that of a family home and there are similarities with the roles of parents.

One participant refers frequently to parenting his own children, indicating that his identity as a parent impacts on his identity as a social care practitioner, but he shows growing awareness throughout the course that social care work requires more than skills developed from being a parent. Cancedda (2001) associates the acquisition of qualifications in care

work with the rejection of the view that caring is based on maternal instinct for the general public but it appears that it applies also to practitioners. When discussing the impact of education on his work practices he states:

[...] you go by what your mother's done and your granny has done and that's the mindset you go in so you think kids should do this but when you see all the different approaches even though you know bits of it you don't know why, you don't know how. And it's great. It clears things up for you.

Darren I.4

With other participants the legal context of residential care which differentiates residential care work from parenting is noted, also showing cognisance of the constraints typical of welfare state professions (Brante, 1990):

You have to learn that things are different to the way you might deal with kids at home 'cos you have to be more conscious of legalities and protection and that kind of thing.

Brenda I.4

Care and Relationship Building

In particular the notion of care is prevalent in health and social care professions (e.g. Gould and Harris, 1996; Clouder, 2003).

When asked about the nature of social care work caring about others and a willingness to help others is seen as central:

Showing that you care is very important.

Matthew I.4

It is literally are you able to care for people. Do you have the personality that can get in the middle of someone's life problems and be there for them?

Paul I.4

Related to providing care for others is the ability to build relationships with clients:

The most essential thing about being a good social care practitioner is relationships and the individual's ability to build a relationship.

Paul I.4

A lot of it [social care work] is basically down to the relationship.

Gerard I.4

Three of the fifteen participants did not work in residential childcare and while understanding and meeting the needs of clients is apparent in their interviews, care and relationship building is not, indicating that this is more applicable to the role of the social care worker in a residential setting where workers share the life-space of clients. Barnes *et al.* (2000) suggest the practice setting as well as the professional group will affect understanding of the professional role and Clouder (2003) found differences between occupational therapists in their view of their role in different settings. It is apparent that relationship building is more central to residential social care work than in other practice settings.

Related to caring is commitment to the work, meaning putting the needs of the clients before your own, concurring with the client-centred approach discussed by Knorth *et al.* (2002) and Hallstedt and Högström (2005). This is seen as an element of being professional. A lack of commitment is viewed as being harmful. In residential childcare commitment to the clients is important as the young people can have trust and relationship difficulties:

I'm really very strong that if you don't like the work get out of the work. You do more harm by being there if you don't like it. Serious harm 'cos for the lads it's another person that they don't trust.

Matthew I.4

But also in community settings:

I find it very difficult to work with people who put their own reputation and politics first [...] because it often stands in the way of the work that we are paid to do. If it wasn't for the clients and difficult communities and disadvantage we would not be here. And if you're not doing the best for these people get the hell out regardless of what salary you're on. Get out 'cos you're just causing more harm.

Laura I.4

Origin of Qualities

While commitment, care and the ability to build relationships are core features, a difference with regard to the origin of these qualities is found among participants. When questioned about how one becomes a professional social care worker a variety of reasons were given by participants. Some see them as inherent in the person. As one participant states "I've had the talent first" (*Peter I.1*).

Others see the qualities as being developed through general life experiences in line with Billett and Somerville's (2004) view that the self is transformed through learning from experience: "through my own upbringing, my standards in life, my willingness to help others [...]. I think life experience is the main element [...]" (*Jane I.4*). Still others emphasise learning through practice and watching others, and these attributes as being gradually learned:

F: How does a person become a professional, do you think?

J: I think you do your apprenticeship. It's coming in. It's listening to people that have a bit of sense about them. Watching how they work. It's

doing the dishes. It's doing the chores. You see what's going on. [...] You watch the dynamic and you get in and do your little bit. [...] You do what you can do. All just slowly.

Jean I.4

Along with commitment, professional social care work is seen as requiring self-awareness and reflection on practices:

Certainly you can be very poor as a child care worker and have great potential if you are prepared to look at yourself. You grow into it. Like a lot of work you grow into it.

Gerard I.4

All participants agree that qualities such as caring and relationship building are not learned through formal education:

F: How does having a degree contribute to being professional?

J: I honestly don't know 'cos I know ones I have worked with in the past who came in and said 'well I have a degree in sociology, psychology and I have my degree in psychotherapy' and I am [saying to myself] but you haven't a fecking clue how to manage people.

Jane I.4

You can go in with the theory and you still don't know how to relate to people.

Paul I.4

The participants in my study view qualities such as being able to care, build relationships, advocate for clients and commitment to their work as being central to the role and identity of social care workers. For residential social care work it is also part of their role to provide a comfortable living environment and use their own interests in doing activities with the

young people. These qualities are seen as being either inherent in the person or developed through work and general life experiences rather than partaking in education. This reasoning could indicate some element of defending themselves as participants compare themselves to a counter-role of the social care worker who gains the qualification prior to full-time work.

Counter-role of Younger Social Care Worker

Burke and Tully (1977) suggest that roles need to be understood in relation to counter-roles that exist within the social structure. A counter-role found in participants' accounts is that of the social care worker who completes the qualifying course directly from second level education and thus is relatively inexperienced before commencing work. While participants were not specifically asked about direct entry students seven compared themselves to them, perhaps for reasons of self-verification. Contradictions were apparent in these accounts particularly in relation to age, as participants themselves had begun working in social care at a similar age, without any qualifications. Yet, age is seen as a significant factor:

I find that now when we have students coming out they are too close to the age of some of the kids and they make friends before they do anything else.

Darren I.2

You now have a situation where you have direct entry, young people coming and training to be child care workers. They'd be better off training to be an adult.

Gerard I.4

Having experience in the workplace is seen as facilitating learning as it allows the application to practice:

F: So you think it is easier to do the course when are that bit older?

G: I'd find it very hard to imagine how the course is run with no experience, at the direct entry level. [...]..I would not be able to be apply any of my learning.

Gerard I.1

Also discovering whether you want to do the job:

And I have to think it's more stressful for direct entry students who are learning everything and then have to walk into a unit. It has to be horrific really. 'Cos we had some students who came over to us and we had a really volatile time between January and February. The unit was destroyed [...]. She [a student] just had one or two little experiences that she said no she's decided it's not the work for her. So I do think it's better if you can get the experience first and then go in and do the course.

Brenda I.4

The position taken by most participants is that experience should precede or accompany training, thus strengthening the status of their role and identity compared to the counter-role:

I would like that when people come in from direct entry from college or from schools that they didn't come and do their degrees with the block placements. I'd much prefer that they came into units and maybe over five years that they did the degree that way.

Paul I.4

I think maybe the mature student thing may be the best way to go about it. That you work for a particular period of time first.

Gerard I.4

A related counter-role is created by some participants based on a perceived divide between 'academic' and 'practical' related to the differentiation between the 'knowing how to' environment of the workplace and 'knowing about' environment of the college (MacDonald and Stratta, 1998; Martin, 2003) or the ideal world of education as opposed to the 'real world' of practice (Adams *et al.*, 2006). This could be due to concerns about being seen as able in their work regardless of performance as a student thus maintaining self-verification of the occupational identity. Bamber and Tett (2000) suggest professional education can lead to critical examination of work practices and readjustment of professional identity. While more participants referred to a division in the first two interviews two participants maintained the split. These participants seem resistant to any change in their professional identities or acceptance of college having an impact. For example when I asked Peter whether he found any impact of studying on his work, he stated that he felt better able to express himself at workplace meetings but qualified this by saying "I don't know whether college has given me a confidence with words", but then referred to a division between theory and practice as he had in previous interviews:

What I have seen over the years and I'm sure I'll continue to see is people who are very academic and very good at theoretical stuff but on a practice level I would say that I am streets ahead of them. [...] Dealing with issues, problems, relating. Whereas someone who may have the qualification, or qualifications as long as your arm but put them in the real world of residential care and what it brings up wouldn't deal with it as effectively and I possibly can or have done.

Peter I.3

Another participant, Sharon also kept her ability to do her job and knowledge of theoretical underpinnings separate:

I think I'm very, very good at my job but don't ask me any questions on theoretical stuff 'cos I'm just going to freeze.

Sharon I.3

In summary, though not being asked about younger students seven of the fifteen participants compared themselves to this counter-role, verifying themselves in both work and education. While a theory/practice or academic/practical divide was referred to in early interviews by twelve participants two participants did not integrate college material with work throughout the data collection period. A factor that could influence students' willingness to integrate identities is that of perceived support from the workplace, which will be discussed in the next section.

Structural Factors impacting on Role and Identity

Workplace Support

Though the importance of education and possession of a professional qualification has been continuously emphasised in social care work in Ireland since the publication of the *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report* in 1970, for both improvements of standards in service provision (CARE, 1972) and the status of social care workers (Williams and Lalor, 2000) variation in the support provided to participants undertaking the course by their workplaces is reported. The compulsory nature of the course is mentioned by some participants when discussing managing the course:

It's political. I have to have it [the degree] if I'm going to stay in the work. I know I do. [...] That's what our union has done on us. They've signed us into this degree.

Jean I.1

I want to get the degree so my wages will go up. So I suppose that is the carrot at the end of the stick.

Susan I.3

Though Boud *et al.* (1985) suggest learners' intentions can influence their approach to education and Foote (1951) proposes that having a role imposed on a person leads to apathetic role performance the relationship between education being mandatory and engagement is not clear-cut. While the majority of participants cited the requirement to gain

a qualification as one of the primary reasons for enrolling in the course initially, they demonstrated different levels of engagement and willingness to appropriate course material into their work. This change in view could be seen as representative of identity change (Blair *et al.*, 1995) or an absence of a relationship between motivations for commencing the course and the interpretation of the role of student and subsequent student identity. It is perhaps more likely that the intentions of the participants are more complex, as suggested by Lea and West (1995) and Illeris (2003), who suggests that adult learners motivations in education are intricate and ambivalent.

Some resentment is evident about perceived lack of financial and other supports:

I have issues about them not paying my full fees. I think in some ways they're very good at telling you, you must do this professional approach, but when it comes to actually stumping up they take a back seat.

Gerard I.1

As well as appreciation of support:

All of them [management and work colleagues] are really supportive. I'm really, really lucky. [...] I'm probably one of the luckiest in the whole group in terms of time, support, finance, everything.

Sharon I.3

Therefore while Ottoson (2000) and Daley (2002) propose that the behaviour of those in the professional community impacts on the individual's learning in professional education it does not appear that perceptions of support from the workplace affects engagement or orientation. The participants' judgements of their own abilities and view of the relationship between theory and practice are found to be a greater influence, which will be discussed below, along with other aspects of their interpretation of student role.

Interpretation of Role of Student

Identification of Self as Student

As found by Merrill (1999), with her part-time student participants, and with the work-related learners in the *Learning Journeys Report* (n.d.), two participants did not identify themselves as students at the beginning of the course. This is likely to be due to the newness of this social identity and the busyness of their lives causing this part of it to be segmented. When asked how they managed the different parts of their lives, these participants said:

But I find it hard sometimes to relate to myself as a student. If you ask me Friday night what I do I would nearly have to stand back and say oh yeah I'm studying as well.

Gerard I.2

[Attending college more often] would make you feel more that you were in college. When I'm planning my week college is an add-on at the end of it because it is probably one of the smaller parts.

Dermot I.1.

Presentation of Self

In her study of female part-time students, Morrison (1992) discusses concerns her participants had about how to present him/herself when beginning a course of study. Some participants refer to concerns about how to present themselves in their new role as student, suggesting initial uncertainty about expectations of the role, particularly with regard to how involved they should be in class. Questions about such concerns were not asked specifically. Staff have been documented to expect adult student to participate in class (Lynch and Bishop Clark, 1998; Kelly, 2005) therefore this concern could be due to this expectation. As discussed in *Chapter 3* the expectations of others in the learning environment are transmitted to the student through pedagogical practices (Edwards and McKenzie, 2005; Sandars, 2005):

You're trying to wonder should I stay quiet or should I try and join a group to study. Talk so everybody notices me.

Matthew I.2

But like I was quite conscious at the beginning [pause]. You know with people saying what's college like. [I said] 'well there's no dickheads trying to take over the class and constantly talking and all that'. Am I turning into that? But like [...] you could split the group in half. You have the people on one side who get involved, who discuss things and you have the other half, the other people who just don't. And I was saying to myself if I'm in that group am I one of the ones [pause] who takes over?

Darren I.1

One participant, Peter, quickly takes on an identity of the class joker, fitting with his stated identity as a 'people person' as well as, perhaps, compensating for expressed fears about college. Kelly (2005) found that mature students may disguise their fears through behaviour giving the impression of confidence. He describes his feelings towards the course as "daunting" and says he is "not particularly looking forward to it". However, "the craic"¹⁸ and everything is fine. You'll notice that I'm the messer at the back" (*Peter I.1*).

Prior Learner Identities

The framework of symbolic interactionism states that when entering a new situation, initial behaviour is based on the identity used, selected from the repertoire of active and latent identities. This identity is then adapted, based on the responses of others in the social situation (Burke and Franzoi, 1988). Prior experience of education is documented as affecting the initial student identity, particularly when these have been negative (e.g. Crossan *et al.*, 2003; Johnston and Merrill, 2004; Haggis, 2004). While some of the participants described their prior experience of education as being negative this did not appear to impact on their early engagement with their present course. While Jane clearly

¹⁸ Fun particularly relating to being amusing company.

stated she had some negative experiences in school she maintained a positive attitude to learning:

When I was growing up teachers didn't bother with you if you didn't catch on. You were thick and you sat at the bottom of class and that was it. You were left there and ignored.

Jane I.1

I struggled through secondary school.

Tina I.1

Other participants described themselves as practical as opposed to academic based on their previous education. As will be discussed below this affected their orientation towards specific modules and their view of how relevant they are to social care work.

Moore (2004) points out that the definition of oneself as practical or academic due to success in school needs to be considered within the socio-historical time period in which the individual lives. When educational possibilities are limited a short initial education is not necessarily seen as being connected to a lack of ability. As discussed in earlier chapters, strategies have been put in place over the last decade to increase participation in higher education in Ireland resulting in a steady increase in the admission rate for both school leavers and mature students (O'Connell *et al.*, 2006).

For some participants going to college was not an option when they were in secondary school and did not impact on judgements of their ability.

College was not even discussed in secondary school for some reason. You know I would have been in the second highest stream. I suggested in the one career guidance class I had three [possible careers], a prison officer, a

journalist and a guard¹⁹ and she [teacher] said that being a journalist is just pie in the sky for you. English was the one subject that I was good at. I just went well it must be and never even thought about it. Lucky enough it didn't get me to a point where I didn't believe in myself or anything.

Gerard I.3

The use of previous student identities is found to be mediated by the time lapse since being in education and the contrast between the skills needed in the college situation and previous educational situations. When talking about the learning skills required in college, participants referred to the contrast with prior learning experiences:

F: Are we as lecturers assuming too much of mature students because they are adults?

M: Yeah, yeah. The last exam I did was the Inter. Cert²⁰. How far back was that and we didn't do much referencing there.

Matthew I.2

F: So how are you finding it?

C: Finding it a bit stressful. Not used to it. I left school when I was 15. I did my Junior Cert. It was called the Inter. then. And that was that. Barely passed that. [...] When I went back to do my Level 2²¹ training it was grand. I did essays and I did exams. Nothing like this because it was just Level 2 childcare. [...] But college is completely different.

Catherine I.1

For some participants who completed secondary school, or had previously experienced higher education, these achievements are seen as representative of a level of ability. One

¹⁹ Police officer from the Irish word for a police officer, *garda*.

²⁰ The participant is referring to the Intermediate Certificate completed after three years of secondary education at age 15 or 16.

²¹ The participant is referring to FETAC (national awarding body for further education and training) Level 2 Childcare Course. FETAC Level 2 is measured at Level 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications whereas the degree course the participant is doing is at Level 7. See http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/frame_action/documents/NQAIFANENGLISH.pdf

participant uses completion of the leaving certificate examination as a measure of a level of ability, expressing concern about failing as he “did the leaving cert” (*Darren I.1*) unlike other students, suggesting that his initial student identity includes judging himself as being academically able based on this measure. Prior success in situations leads to expectations of similar success in new comparable situations (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Another participant states that his prior experience of higher education means “it’s not that jump from secondary school to college for me” (*Dermot I.1*). He refers to skills acquired through previous experience of higher education:

When I’m reading stuff I’m much more able to go to the bits I need and cut out the other stuff. Read the conclusion and then read back on the bits you need to know.

Dermot I.2

Paul, who already has a degree, contrasted his behaviour now to when he was a younger full-time student using the counter-role of younger student to interpret the role and identity of the mature student:

F: Do you find it stressful?

P: I don’t. I seem to be fairly well organised this time and I’ve done a degree before. I did everything at the last minute, didn’t do any of the reading. I did as little as possible and all that.

Paul I.1

While Meyer and Shanahan (2001) suggest that students come to college with both knowledge about specific subjects and general beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning I found that participants’ existing learner identities included judgements of their specific abilities and thus orientation towards specific modules on the course as well as what they say as being useful for social care work.

For example Susan, who describes herself as practical as opposed to academic, based on her having completed the Leaving Certificate Applied as opposed to the Leaving Certificate Established²², says that the course should focus more on practical skills directly relevant to ‘work on the floor’ in residential social care rather than what she sees as more theoretical modules. When discussing the relationship between the course content and her work she says:

They [sociology and social policy] do have an impact but they don’t on the floor. So I just don’t see the relevance really because probably I’m a more practical person, than learning about this history and that. That’s why we’re going to college so why are we learning something that is not so relevant.

Susan I.1

Paul, who judges his learning strength to be in “waffly subjects [...] where you add a bit of opinion”, sees little significance in modules where there is “fiddly detail” and “facts” to be remembered:

[...] certainly health and well being some of the levels of detail that we seem to be expected to do for the course are not levels of detail that we would ever practise.

Paul I.2

Laura, who describes herself as being poor at mathematics in school, discusses her difficulties in doing an examination in law:

²² The Leaving Certificate Applied is offered in some schools in Ireland as an alternative to the more academically orientated Leaving Certificate Established. It is designed for students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the Leaving Certificate Established or who choose not to opt for it. The Programme is administered and assessed by the State Examinations Commission as is the Leaving Certificate Established. See <http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=ca&sc=sd> for more details.

I remember writing for law and it's just like writing maths. It's absolutely logical. Just bit by bit. There is no deviation. There is no flourishing it. There's no sticking in descriptions and details. [...] It drains me. [...] It's like writing with your left hand when you're right handed.

Laura I.4

Impact of Relationship with Work and Social Care Worker Identity

Developing a student identity needs to be considered in relation to the work-related nature of the course. For some participants, performance as a student is perceived as being related to performance as a social care practitioner, complicating the formation of student identity. As illustrated by the quote below, this participant is concerned about his presentation to others as a competent social care worker. This is seen as related to his workplace concurring with the view that understanding of the professional role and professional identity is developed from interaction in the practice setting (Barnes *et al.*, 2000). Consequently judgements can be made between practice settings with regard to professionalism:

We all come from different units and we're saying are these doing the same as we're doing. Are they handling situations as we're doing? Are we as professional as they are? She seems to be talking a very professional type of language. You're kind of sussing everybody out.

Matthew I.2

Performance as a student is perceived by some participants as indicative of their performance as a social care practitioner indicating that self-efficacy as a social care worker also at stake:

You're thinking to yourself when you're writing that if I write this she's going to think I'm crap at my job. That's what you're thinking.

Laura I.2

The interaction between the two social identities affects behaviour. For example from observation in class on 21st September 2004 I noted that one participant, Gerard, consistently questioned and argued in a debate on the topic that childhood is a cultural construction as well as questioning the scientific validity of psychological research and theories. While Gerard's willingness to initiate discussion and ask questions during class can be interpreted as him viewing his role as a student as being one where he is responsible for his own learning (Howard and Baird, 2000; Kember *et al.*, 2003; 2004) comparison with the following extract from the first interview indicates that his behaviour is also indicative of protection of his social care worker identity:

- G: Psychology, your one particularly I was dreading. I think 15 or 20 years in social care you just tend to think oh what the latest theory. [...].
- F: Because you're seeing it in practice day in day out you can't teach me?
- G: Yeah that's right. We tend to think that we know it all anyway.

Gerard I.1

Other participants, as discussed earlier, separated these identities and performances by emphasising a division between academic and practical.

Discipline and Organisation

The greatest commonality among participants in their interpretation of the role of a student was found in relation to the need for discipline, organisation and routine. Literature on views and expectations of adult learners by staff indicate that self-direction and self-management are found (Haggis, 2002; Hafford-Letchfield, 2007) so these aspects of the student role could be due to students' judgments of staff expectations. All fifteen participants referred to this early in the course, when asked how they were fitting the course into their lives, measuring themselves in relation to their interpretation of what was required:

I have to get on a roll. I have to get some sort of routine sorted out. [...]
Maybe because you haven't been in school for a few years you get out of
the doing something every day thing.

Laura I.1

I suppose it's just disciplining myself to do the bit of work every night. I
suppose to set a realistic thing and try and stick with it.

Catherine I.1

Time management is still an issue though I am beginning to feel that
progress is being made.

Paul Diary 12th October

The emphasis on time management and discipline could have been exacerbated by me, the
interviewer, being a member of academic staff.

Academic Language

Concern about the use of academic language was another common theme found in
participants' interviews. The role of the student, particularly in the initial stages of the
course, is interpreted as involving using a particular vocabulary. The perceived language
differences between everyday life and the academic environment have been reported as
causing concern to adult students in higher education (Murphy and Fleming, 1998; Merrill,
2001). Discussion with participants suggested that it was a lack of confidence in their
ability to express themselves contributed to this concern. For example:

F: Yeah putting it in your own words because I can say look I know Catherine
understands this but if it was more of your words.

C: Yeah. I know what you mean yeah.

F: Em I would really know that you understand it but I think it is a confidence
thing. Like you did your psychology essay but when you did it again you used
your own words and now I know she does understand it.

C: You know I think it is too Fiona being in college. When I have these expectations, when people have these expectations of all these words and I'm a simple straight person and I use simple words. And I'm saying will those simple words do?

Catherine I.2

Participants varied in the extent to which they realised that 'everyday' language could be used in writing suggesting a growth in confidence in their own abilities and performance:

I would say I feel more confident in being able to take time and try and translate it into my own words. Whereas at the beginning I just thought I had to do all big words.

Jane I.2

Concerns about how to written expression continued throughout the second year of the course for one participant:

Sometimes you're writing in an exam saying how do I get my point across in the most articulate way instead of just saying it in baby language where it makes sense.

Laura I.4

Understanding and Retention

Being able to understand and retain information was also evident in most participants' accounts, in agreement with other studies (e.g. Brookfield, 1999; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Moore, 2004). The expectation of retention was not related to the assessment method for the module. These comments were given in response to general questions about how they were finding the course, rather than when asked about assessment. Again this may be due my being one of their lecturers:

I find the readings very difficult. 'Cos I sit down and read ten pages and maybe it's just the first paragraph that I have retained. The rest of it is gone. And I haven't got a clue what I just read.

Susan I.1

[...] it's like I'm reading it fine but ask me what's in it now I couldn't tell you. I could tell you basically what it's about but that is it.

Brenda I.1

Asking for Help

Cocklin (1991) points out that being in control and being independent are commonly associated with adulthood, which may affect mature students asking for assistance when required. This is found among the participants in this study as only one of the fifteen stated that she would have no problem approaching college staff for help:

F: If you had a problem, an academic problem, who would you go to?

D: I don't know I think it would depend on the... I probably wouldn't go to anyone, I, I'm not great at asking for help. I'd be slow enough. I have this image of I should be able to do it myself. Maybe it's just like admitting you have a weakness.

Darren I.1

F: So if you had an academic problem or whatever where would you go?

G: Em I'm not great at asking for help you know. I'd be slow enough. I suppose I would go to the lecturer eventually ehem you know I have this image of I should be able to do it myself kind of thing.

Gerard I.1

Reflection

Despite writers on professional education and practice emphasising the importance of critical reflection (e.g. Quicke, 2000; Queeny, 2000; Parton, 2003; Yelder, 2004) the least

common element found in the interpretation of the student role is being open to new ideas and reflecting on them. As Eisikovits and Beker (2001) report many social care workers do not reflect on their practices:

It's great to go back and get your mind expanded or get pushed around a little bit by ideas.

Dermot I.1

I would maybe have been of the school of opinion of what can you learn in college, you know this is real life but I suppose that part of being reflective again is that I didn't find any module or any course not completely unrelated to what I was doing. Maybe that was just me. My ability or my willingness to try and incorporate it.

Gerard I.3

Eraut (1994) suggests that professionals require designated time to reflect on practice for them to learn from it and for it to contribute to their professional knowledge. The lack of facilitation of reflection within the structures and organisation of social care practice is documented (Heron and Chakrabarti, 2002b; Smith, 2005). The participants who see part of the student role as being open to new ideas also see college as a space in which they have the opportunity to reflect on their role as social care workers, as found by Vatcher and Cole (2004). The incorporation of reflection into the student role could also be affected by structural factors, particularly, the teaching methods and assessment practices within the college. Nikolou-Walker (2007) suggests that to enable work-related learners to reflect on work practices the learning environment and assessment methods must facilitate this. As discussed below, participants moved from a meaning to achieving orientation to cope with the workload. Alternatively this finding could be due to the timing of data collection as it is possible that participants became more reflective in their final year of the course.

In conclusion, for a minority of students there were early concerns about how to present themselves as a student and others did not identify with the new role. While prior

experiences of education were varied previous negative experiences did not impact on early engagement with the course. Instead previous successes were seen as representing ability, which for one participant contributed to a fear of failure. The effect of prior learner identities was seen in participants' views of specific modules and judgements of the relevance of these to social care work. Examining the affect of the social care practitioner identity on the development of the student identity suggests that presentation of self as a competent social care worker complicates the formation of a student identity. The most common features of the student role concur with those found in literature on adult learners, these being the need for discipline and organisation, as well as concerns about retention and academic language. In spite of the course being work-related the least common aspect of the student role found was reflection on college material and practice. Despite voiced concerns and worries only one participant stated that she would approach staff for assistance. The next section focuses on the structural factors in society and the college which are identified as affecting the role interpretation and identity as a student.

Structural Factors Impacting on the Student Role

Societal Value of Education

Burke and Franzoi (1988 p.559) suggest that "behaviour can only be understood within a particular situational context". They propose that the situation consists of two factors, one of which is "the location or place defined by social conventions" (p.561) which, in my study, is a social sciences department in a third-level institution. The social meanings attached to third-level education are therefore significant. In Ireland participation in higher education and possession of a third level qualification are valued (Dunne, 2002; Share *et al.*, 2007). Most participants valued being in college, particularly as it was not an opportunity available to them when they were younger:

F: Do you feel more confident in yourself or less confident in yourself?

C: Em, I feel a bit more. This sounds really silly. I feel a bit more important because I'm in college. I know people slag me but because I'm a mature student I'd say yeah. Because when I was in primary school I would have never thought of going to college.

Catherine I.1

F: Is there anything else you want to say?

R: No just I'm absolutely thoroughly enjoying myself. I love walking into college and I love walking up the steps going I'm in college.

Ruth I.2

One participant however, appears to resist the social value of higher education, using the association between education and employment common in policy documents (Collins, 2000; Dunne, 2002) to explain his position:

I'm not ashamed that I don't have any qualifications. I've never been unemployed in my life. I have a brain in my head and I have principles.

Peter I.1

For another participant the experience of college changes his viewpoint:

Yeah there is a certain sense, I'm glad that I engaged with university because I suppose I was missing in some ways from my CV that I wasn't honest enough to say that it probably bothered me more.

Gerard I.3

College Environment and Impact on Identity

The second component of a situation, identified by Burke and Franzoi (1988), is the "set of social relationships and expectations within which people find themselves" (p.561). In a similar view Sandars (2005, p.194) refers to dynamic interaction between "socially embedded influences" in an activity system or community and the beliefs of individuals. These includes the participants' interpretations of what is expected of them as students of social care practice, transmitted through relationships with staff and each other, as well as the measurement of their performance as students.

Relationships with Staff

As identity is formed in interaction with others in a social context or system relationships with staff have been reported to have a significant impact on the student identity formed. Factors such as approachability, support and respect for adult status are found in the literature (e.g. Gallacher *et al.*, 2002; Johnston and Merrill, 2004; Leung and Kember, 2005).

In my study relationships with staff were generally seen positively, in particular expected respect for adult status:

F: Did you feel that, you know you came into the college with some experience as a social care practitioner. Did you feel that in lectures that this was valued?

T: Yeah I noticed because I was at a course previous. I was in a two year course and I went in like not knowing anything and going in as a mature student and having a bit of experience and I kind of noticed the difference between the lecturers. They had some kind of respect for you

Tina I.3

F: Did you feel supported in your first year in college?

D: [...] I found the lecturers grand. [...] people didn't treat you like an idiot. The expectation is there that you know a certain amount of stuff. You're treated like an adult. Now I've been to college and you're treated like a child, which is very off-putting.

Dermot I.3

It is unlikely that participants' responses were due to concern about talking about my colleagues in the interviews as criticisms and complaints were made, which as discussed in *Chapter 5*, caused me some personal concern. The lack of provision of information was at times, seen as an issue for some participants, particularly because of the part-time nature of the course:

If we're only there one day a week we don't have the time to go around finding out information.

Susan I.3

At the end of the second year participants were more able to source information themselves and appear to feel more in control of the environment:

But I didn't really want to complain last year. That a difference too. I felt I know what to do and I know I can ask. And if I don't ask it's my fault.

Jean I.4

Class Involvement

Staff perceptions of adult students include seeing them as more likely to participate in class (Lynch and Bishop-Clark, 1998). Adult students themselves are also reported to expect at least acknowledgement, of their experiences as respect for their adult status (Johnston and Merrill, 2004), if not the use of practice examples and discussions to assist in linking theory and practice (Bishop-Clark and Lynch, 1992). For my participants involvement in class through discussion is seen as being representative of being treated like an adult and helping learning, as well as maintaining interest:

I find at times that I'm being treated like a school kid in some classes and I don't particularly think I learn much from the session. In other classes I feel more relaxed and involved because there is room for discussion and questions.

Peter Diary 19th October

F: The powerpoint shouldn't be the lecture but should be a focal point that you talk around?

J: Yeah and I think the best way of learning anything is hearing other people's views. For me that gives lots. Otherwise it's just big academic

words that went straight over my head. Hearing other people saying what they thought it was makes it fall into place.

Jane I.3

F: How are you finding the course?

B: [...] Sociology is just going out the window [...] there's not enough discussion for me. I like discussion in class 'cos it keeps me interested.

Brenda I.1

While it is suggested (Kember, 2001; Kember *et al.*, 2003; 2004) that orientations towards learning vary between novice and experienced students, with experienced students expecting more discussion and an equal and interactive relationship with lecturers, there was no difference found in my study between participants who could be categorised as novice or experienced. None could be classified as reproductive learners with regard to views on class interaction, even during the early months of the course. However as the first year progresses and greater confidence is gained the social identity of adulthood is seen to increasingly impact on student identity. The literature reports that adult students often differentiate themselves through negotiating different rules from 'traditional' students (Cocklin, 1991), such as determining "their own attendance patterns and level of commitment" (p.14). As reflected in the quotes above and below the participants expected acknowledgement of their adult status with regard to pre-existing knowledge as well as resisting being treated in a way that they saw as being more typical of how children were treated in particular not requiring external discipline and expectations of equality.

I said I'm not a child and I really don't appreciate being told I cannot talk in a class. [...] I said we're not children and it's not as if we were all shouting and gabbing. We were talking among ourselves but we were doing our work.

Catherine I.3

I think what happened was, obviously we're grown adults, if something was said or something happened we just went no sorry I disagree with that. This is my opinion and this is why I disagree with that.

Sharon I.3

Conversely reports of lack of self-discipline and expectations of lecturers to maintain control in the classroom, what one participant describes as adolescent behaviour, are found:

We're all there nearly like teenagers and we're talking at the back and then they're giving out why isn't the lecturer keeping control over this class. And we're mature adults up there you know. S/he shouldn't have to keep control over us. S/he's there to give the spiel and that. We have regressed big time.

Matthew I.1

Provision of Material and Structure

However while interaction and discussion in class is welcomed, the provision of relevant material and structure seen as required for success on assessments is expected, as also found by Ross-Gordon (1991) and Merrill (1999), for example.

It's nice having discussions and all that but when you're going back to reference something or quote something and you don't have a lot to quote from.

Darren I.4

S/he would sit at the top of the room and just talk. [...] It was great 'cos you could make a comment. And you could follow what was going on. When it came to the exam it wasn't that easy. We could have done with a bit more structure.

Jean I.4

Entwistle and Tait (1990) draw attention to the impact of the learning environment on students' orientations to learning and Chappell *et al.* (2003) to the influence of pedagogical practices to student identities formed. As identity determines behaviour changes in approaches to learning are viewed as identity adaptations in relation to the social context. One way in which this is apparent among participants is the development of a more strategic approach (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983) to the workload to enable them to cope, showing adaptation to the expectations and constraints of the educational system or "manipulating the environment [...] for which the role has responsibility" (Stets and Burke, 2000 p.226). This is similar to findings from other studies of mature learners (e.g. Merrill, 1999; Johnston and Merrill, 2004; *Learning Journeys Report*, n.d.), where students are reported to make changes to their style of learning to enable them to meet requirements. Meeting the course requirements enables the student to receive positive feedback for their performance thereby impacting on self-esteem and self-efficacy. This could be considered indicative of an adaptation in student identity as participants became more secure in judging what was required in agreement with Merrill's (1999) findings of adult students 'bending the rules' after their initial period of adjustment to college:

F: You were saying the last time that trying to fit everything in was really hard.

S: Yeah I've just stopped reading now. No in all honesty I have actually. In the beginning I was reading everything every week and em now what I find I'm tending to do is I tend to read the things I need to read for the next week rather than any extras.

Sharon I.2

F: You've become aware of your own limits? That's another thing you've learned about yourself?

B: Kind of yeah. Doing too much is actually as bad as doing too little. It is because the first few weeks I was really trying to read everything. [...] and then I had the feeling I could do more at the end of it so that was

worse. [...] I feel better now since I said I'd focus more on the assignments and I'm getting bits done in between.

Brenda I.1

A similar change is found with some participants in my study in relation to assessment. A change in orientation from a meaning one to that of achieving (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983) in relation to assessment is apparent while still expressing an interest in topics as Sutherland (1995) also reports:

I'm really looking forward to there not being any pressure and being able, in the summer, to read the stuff to see how much knowledge I have gained. With no pressure on me to get it down on paper.

Jane I.2

At the end of the day the ultimate is to get your marks and pass. It is sad in a way because you don't have all the time to read so many things that you could learn from. But maybe afterwards when you're finished college you could be reading bits and pieces.

Brenda I.4

While, like Merrill's (1999) participants Brenda points to disparate views of education, learning versus performance, she did not experience the frustration that Merrill reports. However this more strategic approach to assignments was not found to be synonymous with a mastery approach (Billett, 2010) to the material for all participants

Assessment

Verification in the role of the student through acceptable performance in assessment is reported as increasing confidence. While Stevens (2003) and Moore (2004) report that the process of developing confidence as an adult learner is a gradual one and related to the satisfaction of acquiring knowledge and understanding, participants in my study also refer

to the measure of successful performance through grades. Hoelter (1986) links successful role performance of an identity to increased self-esteem and self-efficacy:

Like say the last time we did this [interview] I didn't feel confident about getting through it but once you start getting the marks through bit by bit.

Darren I.2

Successful role performance increases the salience of the social identity for the individual thus increasing the influence the identity has over an individual's behaviour (Burke and Tully, 1977). The impact of being seen as successful in their role as students is affected by the connection that some participants made between success in the student role and success in their work role, referred to earlier in the chapter. In addition the relationship between work and college exposes the participants' success to their work colleagues and managers.

It is very public. You're putting yourself out. I mean the manager and the director and all said well done on your exams, which is great when you pass them but it's hard in a certain sense of why do you have to know.

Gerard I.3

Fear of failure is expressed, affecting student identity through judgments of oneself as well as by others of being capable. As pointed out by James (1995) and Davies and Williams (2001) grades are judged by students to be indicative of abilities and even personal worth as opposed to the lecturer view of "judgements of worth of academic products" (James, 1995 p.463):

I think I realised then that what was bothering me more was fear of failing that anything else. [...]What is going to be on your sheet.

Darren I.1

[...] my opinion of myself is at stake because I'm thinking of what people think of me. The people I work with. How I do really affects how they're going to think of me.

Laura I.1

Self-verification impacts on self-esteem and self-efficacy, particularly when an identity is important for an individual (Hoetler, 1986). One participant describes the impact achieving a grade higher than she expected had on her belief to be able to do the course:

F: You said you felt down throughout the year and that. Did you ever feel enough, I'm getting out of here?

J: Yeah. I suppose half way through the year I really thought that I just wasn't cut out to be a student. I just can't do it and it was awful. I really was on the verge of packing it in and then I got my psychology results. That really gave me the boost that I needed at the time to confirm that I might not be able to do it all and understand it all but I can do it.

Jane I.3

Another participant with a salient student identity also talks about the motivating effect of grades:

F: Did anything in college impact on you feeling able to do the course?

P: [...] when your marks are coming back that you're happy with it encourages you to keep going. I know that people who were getting lower marks were finding it less reason to keep going than I do.

Paul I.3

While another mentions the importance of being seen to succeed by others. As Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) suggest, increased confidence reported in mature students can be at least partially attributed to the public nature of academic success:

Getting my results at the end of the year it gave me a good boost to say I can do it. It is making me feel that I can do it and telling me to have a little more faith in myself. [...] Actually I seen one of them [teacher from school] and she was a bit shocked when I said what I was doing. She said 'what are you doing at the moment'. A degree course [I said].

Tina I.3

Taylor (1983 in Entwistle 1987) suggests that success and failure is measured against students' own targets, based on judgements of their own potential and personal goals, fitting with their identity as a student. That the grade received reflected the amount of work and effort put in to the assessment is important to some participants:

F: How did you support yourself? What kind of tactics did you develop to get through it?

D: A pragmatic approach. [...] I done enough and I have to say I thought for myself that the marks reflected the amount of effort more or less I put in.

Dermot I.3

While this was evident for a few of the participants, there was also comparison of grades received to those of other students, with judgement of self-worth against others, particularly during the first semester of the course. This suggests that students were less aware and confident of their own abilities, and skills to be learned. Kelly (2005) notes that there is usually greater diversity among mature students which was true for these participants with regard to learning skills, motivation and prior educational level and led to difficulties when students compared grades:

F: How did your essay go?

C: It went well. I'm passing so far. But I just feel as if, like I only got 44% in it and I put a lot of work into it. I did put a lot of work into it.

[Partner's name] was saying just remember Catherine you have people in your class that got 80% and you got 44% but you'll still all get your degree.

Catherine I.2

F: Anything else you would like to add?

M: I'm finding it difficult, it's tough but I'm very happy to be there and I'm determined I'm going to see it out. So far the essays they've been good, reasonably good. [...] when I got them back initially I sat back and said okay you're only learning to do this again you've got to give yourself a chance. We always go to the brightest person and say what did you get? You know they're going to say they got twice as much and you say oh my God I'm so stupid whereas we're not. We're just learning.

Matthew I.2

As reported in other studies (e.g. MacDonald and Stratta, 1998; Inglis and Murphy, 1999; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003), some difficulties are reported by participants in my study about expectations for, and feedback on assignments. Knowing what to do and how to do it appears to reduce anxiety and increase self-responsibility, rather than more general reassurances:

We need written out exactly what they want. Yours I know exactly what you wanted. I couldn't fault that. The only person I can blame is myself this time out on that. Other people are giving us work and saying ah don't worry about that.

Jean I.2

It's nice to see where you're going wrong. Maybe the next time around you'll be able to change it.

Dermot I.2

Frustration was evident when participants considered feedback to be insensitive or did not help them improve:

I got one [assignment] back there recently. [...] S/he kind of tore me apart in one way. Told me I wasn't putting sentences together right. [...] There was no structure. [...] Everything wasn't right and then again s/he kind of said well it's all right for where you are. It wasn't that constructive. I wanted her/him to say well that is not really the way I wanted it but this is the way.

Matthew I.2

Differences in expectations of lecturers, compared to students, with regard to the use of theoretical as opposed to practical knowledge is apparent. As found by Sutherland (1999) the work-related nature of an educational course can lead to the students using a more concrete and practical approach in learning and writing rather than the abstract and theoretical approach valued in academic institutions (Boud, 2001; Martin, 2003). Bamber and Tett, 2000) note the difficulties for both lecturers and students in work-related courses in incorporating work experiences and theory into academic writing. For example one participant seemed confused by feedback on an assignment:

The feedback I got didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. It kind of just said I hadn't put enough theory into it.

Susan I.2

Peer Relationships

Some participants refer to the part-time nature of the course affecting opportunities to interact with other students, and getting support from peers:

The only criticism I would have of the course would be there is not enough time to just enjoy the college experience. You can't network with people. [...] You never get to meet people; to know exactly what they do; how they've handled this situation.

Laura I.2

Though many participants said that the class as a whole was not cohesive the feeling of commonality with the other students in terms of going through the same experience was evident and was considered to be motivating. Authors such as Brookfield (1999) and Gallacher *et al.* (2001) propose that forming relationships with those that are in a similar situation with common concerns has been found to be a critical source of emotional and social as well as informational support:

F: What do you enjoy about the course?

T: Just that we are all in the same boat that we all feel the same and because of work.

Tina I.2

J: Yeah I mean literally. I was waking up at five in the morning saying oh my God I need to get it finished; I need to get it done. Do you know?

F: Yeah why am I wasting my time sleeping I should be writing my essay? I've been there. It's horrible.

J: It is. It really is. I thought right I really need to cop on here. This is ridiculous. Now every week when I go back into college on Tuesday and I speak to everybody else it reassures me. Because everybody is in the same boat.

Jane I.1

Study groups were also seen as a benefit for learning:

And because there is such a fluid subject matter it is about argument. [...] there is no theory that you have to learn off by heart. [...] on its own it's fairly dry, and it is only through debating it and arguing it is there any sense of it coming alive.

Gerard I.4

But definitely it's [study group] helped because even having assignments to discuss them and stuff. Herself and myself go up on the train together and we'd meet up for exams for a few days of study.

Brenda I.4

The societal value of third level education was evident in participants' accounts, seen as contributing to a feeling of importance for participants who no previous experience of university for all but one participant, who did not acknowledge positive effect of college in his work either. Staff related factors in the college environment examined were relationships, class involvement, provision of information and assessment. While expectations of staff were sometimes contradictory agreement between participants were also present. These were expectations of acknowledgement of their status as adults, class discussion to maintain interest and facilitate learning as well as constructive details of and feedback on assignments. As participants became more experienced students their interpretation of the role changed particularly in relation to acknowledgement of their age and knowledge and their management of the workload. The most motivating factor to continue in college was recounted to be grades which reflected the effort put into work. Relationships with peers were particularly important in relation to similarity of experiences and emotional support. While study groups were found to be beneficial these took time to form, suggesting the need for a more proactive intervention by staff. The next section will deal with the third research question, the interaction between identities, in particular those of student and social care practitioner.

Interaction between Identities

Personal Identity and Social Identities

Variations in emphasis on different aspects of the social care worker role are indicative of individual interpretations, affected by experience, but also the need to fit with aspects of the more pervasive level of personal identity. Ibarra (1999) found that the aspects of the professional role need to fit with “internal standards of self-congruence” (p. 774) for an identity to be formed. This is particularly significant in social care work as the use of self is a central aspect and the need to know oneself emphasised (Hicks *et al.*, 1998; Smith, 2005; Garfat *et al.*, 2005).

For example Peter, who describes himself as “a people person” (*I.1*) sees relationship building as the most significant aspect of his work: “I’d much rather spend time on the floor doing interaction and relationships” rather than other tasks such as “writing up reports” (*I.4*). This quality is also apparent in his student identity as he talks about the importance to him of “communicating with people, having a laugh with people, socialising with people” (*I.1*), which is confirmed by observations in class.

For Darren, the ability to build relationships with the young people in his care is seen as both part of his personal identity: “kids gravitate towards me a lot” (*I.1*) and due to his experience of parenting:

And again I keep going back to being a parent, like with three kids grown up. No trouble. No drugs. They have a drink. They’re all working. And I think I did a good job. [...] So I think I can do that again. Not to the same extent but even if the kids that I look after pick up bits and pieces.

Darren I.4

The caring aspect of his social care worker identity (“the business with are in you are not prone to say no” *I.1*) is transferred to his student identity initially, with concern expressed for classmates throughout the first two interviews, as well as taking on a helping role. This

behaviour does not appear to elicit expected reactions from others as he changes this behaviour in the second year of the course:

F: So how did your view of yourself as a student or a learner change over the year or did it? You said you lowered your expectations.

D: When I got back in second year it was eh I was a bit more laid back. For a lot of the first year I was kind of the mammy. [...] Where I still swap stuff around now I wasn't emailing people as much. I kind of closed down.

Darren I.4

With Matthew age and maturity are seen as positive qualities in his identity as a social care worker:

The one thing I have going my way is that maturity [...]. I do have a way and it seems to work. It comes with age, like whiskey. It does have a calming [effect].

Matthew I.1

However age is not seen as advantageous to being a student, which could be related to societal views of college being a place for young adults as reported by Lynch, 1997 and Kasworm, 2005):

'Cos I'm of the age that I'm not so good at going down and photocopying stuff. That kind of frightens me. I don't want to be there and fifty kids behind me and me making an eejit of myself.

Matthew I.3

Paul describes himself "as one of the more quiet and peaceful personalities" in his workplace, able to bring calmness with a consequent "downside" of not being "confrontational around issues that need to be confronted" (I.4). While observation

confirms Paul's quietness in class initially, academic success appears to affect his self-efficacy as evidenced by an increasing tendency to question and debate in the classroom (*Observation Notes January 10th 2005*).

Academic success also increases the salience of his student identity motivating him to work hard and perform well in assessments throughout his first year in college:

It surprised me that I was as competitive as I was but I guess when you realise that you can do something you do begin to.

Paul I.3

The salience of his student identity is also evidenced by making use of knowledge learned in college in the workplace (Serpe and Styker, 1987) and frustration when his behaviour is not verified:

F: You said before that there was a transfer happening, that with some of the material you were covering in college you could see how it fitted in with work.

P: Yeah.

F: Has that improved or changed in any way?

P: Psychology was made much more relevant. [...] But even with psychology, I said at a staff meeting, I believe he [a client] is operating at a three, four or five-year old emotional level. I was immediately told that I can't say that because I was not a trained psychologist. So what is the point of the course if I can't make an assessment and I can't give an opinion.

Paul I.2

Impact of Social Care Worker Identity on Student Identity

As well as views of oneself as practical or academic, interpretations of the role of the social care worker, particularly views of the relationship between theory and practice is found to

affect student identity. The majority of participants (twelve) demonstrate similar views of the theory practice relationship as well as approaches to learning and college work. The three participants who have disparate views will be discussed first.

Two participants appear to give primacy to knowledge derived from practice experiences (Cervero, 1992) and workplace policies, though this is expressed in different ways for each of them and some contradiction is evident.

Peter, who from the beginning of the course states that “If registration and all of that bit wasn’t coming into social care I wouldn’t be going through college” (I.1) sees the skills required in social care work as being due to “natural talent” (I.1). He talks of a division between theory and practice viewing theories as excuses for behaviour:

F: We were talking about theories, the usefulness of theories.

P: I’ve always found theories used as an excuse. Recently when one client of mine was warned about slamming doors and abusing people and I sat and listened in disbelief hearing four different views. [...] All we seem to be doing is making excuses for him.

Peter I.1

Also theoretical material is seen as not applicable in the “real world of residential care” (I.2) dealing with behaviour: “when you’re faced with somebody coming at you with a chair you can fuck the theory out the window” (I.4). However, at the same time he talks of a need for “understanding the theoretical side. To be able to name things or to come up with possibilities of what this is about” (I.3). He also states it as his “professional duty to up skill” and “learn new ways of thinking” (I.4). Peter takes a strategic approach to college completing course work but not appearing to seek meaning in the material covered, what Billett (2010) refers to as mastering as opposed to appropriating knowledge.

F: So how did the year go?

P: Not quick enough is the answer. [...] There was very little to motivate me in the classes that we were doing. [...] Like in one of the classes within the second week of the class we had our essay titles for the end of the year and then it became quite obvious that the stuff we were doing every week after that had no relevance or bearing to your essay title so what was the point of going to class.

Peter I.4

He on the one hand states that there are limitations of this stating that he is “more focused internally on what I need to do to get me through” but a “downside” of this is “not opening up to new ways of learning or trying different techniques” (I.4) but on the other hand he appears to consider the educational programme futile:

F: You say you see one of the jobs of being a professional, one of the responsibilities of being a professional is upskilling. Does this degree upskill you?

P: I suppose this whole question is still out there that you’re just going for the piece of paper and then as lots of people, or the joke that goes around about college is that you go through college for three years and then you go out and forget about everything you learned in college.

Peter I.4

Similarity between Peter and another participant, Sharon was found. On the one hand, Sharon talks of theory as informing and explaining practice:

F: Do you think doing the degree will make you a better social care practitioner?

S: Yeah I think it will make me better in the sense that, I suppose as it stands now I really believe, hand on heart, that nobody can tell me I’m not good at my job. As far as I’m concerned I’m excellent at my job. I know I am. And that’s the practice side of things but where I’ve always let myself down is the theory side

of it. So if at the end of this three years I have the theory and I'm able to use the theory in the sense that I know exactly what approaches I'm using and why certain legislation is used. And what it means and all of that palaver then it is going to make me more informed. Obviously it has to make you better. It can't make you worse can it, if you are more informed

Sharon I.3

But yet she sees her work practices as being informed by experience and workplace training rather than education, unlike Sargeant (2000, p.648), who reports that social care workers after completing NVQs saw their practice as being informed by "an authoritative source of good practice that has legitimacy beyond the workplace".

F: Have your work practices been challenged by what you learned in college?

S: I don't think my work practices have changed or been challenged because I suppose I've been doing it for quite a few years now and I've done continuous in house training. Our policies and procedures are very, very straightforward and they are very clear.

Sharon I.3

As with Peter, Sharon takes a strategic approach to college work. The apparent contradictions in the statements of these participants could reflect Illeris's (2003) proposal of ambivalence in the approach some adults take to education. These participants both state the primary reason for enrolling in the course is 'to get qualified' for reasons of both finance and freedom to move within the sector. Unlike most of the other participants they maintain a clear division between their student and social care practitioner identities. This perhaps reflects an attempt to avoid challenge to the pre-existing social care practitioner identity, which could indicate "the formation of a strong identity defence" as "discarding parts of the old identity [...] is often a process that is far more difficult and causes more pain [...]" (Illeris, 2003 p.16). The anxiety involved in critical examination of work

practices and thus occupational identity is documented in discussions of professional education (Bamber and Tett, 2000; Yelder, 2004).

Another participant, Susan, who describes herself as practical, questions the relevance of modules that are not directly applicable to work with clients indicating a view of theory as “a direct guide to action” (Eraut, 2003 p.62), as discussed in the earlier section *Prior Learning Identities*.

Then when the module has a close relationship with her work, the role of theory and relating it to practice appears to cause her difficulty in written work as evidenced when she discusses feedback on an assignment:

S: S/he said it was too much commonsense but that is what P&P²³ is really like. [...] I tend to go off with my examples.

F: Maybe s/he wanted you to use theories?

S: So I said well am I meant to actually take the whole thing from the book. Basically put it into my own words.

Susan I.2

Susan’s approach to learning appears to vary depending on whether she sees it as relevant to practice or not, adopting a meaning perspective when relevant and a strategic approach when it is not, as she says in the first interview:

One thing I will say about the course. I don’t know why we do social policy and I don’t know why we do sociology. To me now they just don’t. I don’t know the actual name of it. P&P is very practical in work. Psychology is. Art as well actually ‘cos we can do art with the kids but I would rather a course with just had psychology, P&P and health and well-being because that’s to do with our job. I put more time into understanding those subjects than the other two.

²³ The participant is referring to the module Principles of Professional Practice.

The remaining twelve participants express views that indicate they see theory is a resource that aids understanding of practice (Eraut, 2003), mentioning changes such as greater understanding of cultural differences (*Catherine I.1*), the behaviour of clients (*Tina I.2*), and professional boundaries (*Ruth I.3*). All of these participants appear use a combination of meaning and strategic or mastery and appropriation approaches to college work affected by the constraints of a system where performance is assessed. Some participants refer to the restrictions imposed on their learning by the limitations of assignments:

I love learning but I absolutely hate having to get down to assignments.

Ruth I.4

I think you only know what you want to learn by reading everything.
[Assignments] take the fun out of it. Thinking I have to write this stuff
now and what angle am I coming from. Why are you ruining it with such
a rigid essay title?

Laura I.4

However these participants vary in the extent to which they take, what Fealy (1997) describes, as a critical approach, in which theory is used by practitioners to gain insight into as well as transform their understanding of both themselves and the situation in which they practice. This seems to be affected by the ability and willingness of participants to engage in reflection. Three participants refer to college as a space away from the workplace in which reflection can take place and is encouraged by the nature of the course work and their interpretation of the student role, as referred to earlier.

Other participants also referred to the impact of education in encouraging questioning and reflection, as also found by Karban and Frost (1998) with residential social care workers. Not all these participant specifically cited college as a space which facilitated reflection or the student role as permitting it:

F: Do you think that doing the degree will make you a better social care practitioner?

P: Yes I do. There have been aspects of it [college] where I've thought oh I like the way that theory goes or I can argue that piece of it or I can say I considered, done a risk assessment of this and cite this reason for it or whatever. I think overall it will make me more reflective.

Paul I.3

F: Have your work practices changed by what you have learned in college?

B: They haven't changed dramatically but as I say my confidence level has risen and I feel better equipped to handle bad situations. I sense the kids feel it too and respond as they know you are in control. I'm focusing on a more therapeutic approach also and am more aware of how I'm feeling inside and how the kids may be affected by circumstances.

Brenda I.3

F: And do you feel it is college that has contributed a lot towards that confidence?

J: And my practice teacher. [...] I love going to college I must say 'cos it does give me the space to breathe and I have looked at the whole area. I see it differently.

Jean I.4

Impact of Education on Social Care Worker Identity

Status

One of the characteristics of a profession is possession of a recognised educational credential (Friedson, 1988b cited in Friedson, 1990). Possession of a degree is seen as

contributing to confidence about the professional status of social care work and thus professional identity:

F: Is education contributing to that change [social care work being seen as professional]?

J: Eventually everybody is going to have the degree. And I think that everybody is feeling a bit more confident. Yes I am a professional. I am educated. I'm not just a wee dogsbody.

Jane I.4

Norton (1999) found, in her study of the perception of social care practitioners and social workers of each other, the majority in each profession considered social care practitioners to be of a lower status. One of the effects of education mentioned by participants is a feeling of increased status in relation to social workers, thus contributing to a positive professional identity, despite the status differences inherent in the working relationship (*Social Services Inspectorate Annual Report, 2004*).

F: Do you see yourself as a professional?

J: Oh Yeah. The biggest obstacle to our work are social workers. [...] I know if I've to stay in this work I have to start dealing with these people [social workers] and I have to be on a par with them. I know that more and more I feel I am on a par with them.

Jean I.4

F: Do you consider yourself to be a professional?

J. I would yeah [...] Before I used to think the social workers are so much better than me now I just think we do different jobs but we're on the same level. We just provide different services for the young people we work with.

Jane I.4

However all participants agree that to work professionally involves more than possessing a qualification. For example when asked about differences between qualified and unqualified staff Brenda responded:

Again a lot, I feel has to do with experience on the job. Each centre has its own way of working as a team. From the perspective of seeking employment elsewhere definitely. I also see staff with no qualifications and recognise them to be excellent with the kids and in the job and know some qualified staff who I feel spend their time suiting themselves and use work to meet their own needs.

Brenda I.3

Work Practices

Education is seen as enhancing their work practices by all except two participants, suggesting transfer between the activity system of college and that of the workplace (Engeström, 2001) This disagrees with Cervero (1992) and Mott's (2000) proposal that professionals believe the knowledge "acquired from practice is far more useful than what they acquire from the more formal forms of education" (Cervero, 1992 p.91). On the other hand, as discussed previously, the prevalent view among my participants is that some qualities required for social care work are either inherent in the person or learned through life or practice experience. As people behave in ways that are congruent with the relevant identity, stated changes in work practices reflect identity changes.

Participants refer to both direct knowledge acquired during the course and improved understanding as found by Karban and Frost (1998) with regard to residential child-care workers in the U.K. These impact on professional identity through increasing confidence in their work practices and greater awareness of alternative approaches, thus increasing feelings of personal autonomy.

Policies and legislation and developmental psychology are more commonly mentioned:

F: You have said all along what college was doing was giving you big picture stuff and affirming what you were doing was right?

J: Yeah it's a tricky one yeah. [...] It certainly has highlighted a lot of thing for me that, you know, the legal side of things just for instance. I had never paid much attention to that. You know you have somebody coming in on a supervision order or voluntary care or whatever but now I know what's behind it all before they come in.

Jane I.4

F: So education gives you the theory behind it?

B: And I think it gives you more confidence that you have an understanding of national standards and all those kinds of things can just give you, maybe makes you aware of what way you're working and what way you can maybe do things differently or change things.

Brenda I.4

Influenced by their study of developmental psychology, three students mentioned that they were more likely to take account of the background and experiences a young person has prior to coming into residential care, when asked about the impact of college on their work practices:

I work with fourteen to eighteen year olds. I never really considered their childhoods. It seems to me that I take them from where there are now and we work within a very limited time span. We might get a lad at sixteen and a half or seventeen and we might only have him until nineteen, twenty. So you tend to approach him in a way that look whatever happened, happened. This is what we need to do to move on. [...] But I have to say that is what I'm enjoying is knowing that these kids had a life and their parents had a life. At different stages things might have happened and it has affected where they are today.

Gerard I.1

We'd be looking back at their early years and seeing what bits are missing. We'd be looking at their behaviour. That's why psychology I would put more weight on in this course, certainly from a residential point of view.

Paul I. 1

Other modules studied, such as sociology and social policy, led to participants thinking more about the social care system and influenced the tendency to question the status-quo. Less acceptance and increased questioning is reported to be one of the outcomes of participating in higher education (O'Fathaigh and O'Sullivan, 1997; Merrill, 1999; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003):

F: You have mentioned in the interviews that there are some subjects that are more directly related to practice than others but in general did you find that your work practices or the way you think about your work practices have been challenged or changed, or even enlightened in any way by college?

D: [...] The child is like that for a reason and it's not a reason that they've chosen it's just the way that they are. Em but even the ordinary stuff I suppose the stuff, if you go to the social policy. You know the stuff like social welfare even though it does not directly impinge on, it does [matter] because nearly all the kids here, their parents are on social welfare. They have come out of rough areas where there has been very little chance of, of excelling themselves. So even the stuff that's impractical in that sense is actually practical because it makes you question.

Dermot I.3

F: You mentioned previously as well that one of the positive aspects of the course was you felt broadening your attitude towards work. Making you more open and more willing to question?

G: [...] I think the course is quite well geared towards looking holistically at where things are [...] I suppose I found it difficult sometimes to hear people say what does it have to do with me and how does it make a connection to what I work at. When you're working by and large with vulnerable, marginalised groups it has got everything to do with you. Just question things.

Gerard I.2

Confidence

The experience of partaking in education is described as increasing confidence, as has been documented in studies of adult learners (e.g. Stevens, 2003; Moore, 2004). This confidence is transferred to the workplace and as a consequence improves work practices:

I think it's [taking part in the course] having some impact, confidence and relationships. When I'm confident it gives me the opportunity to interact more with the clients and with the team.

Tina I.3

Confidence is perhaps increased through affirmation and support of existing work practices (Vatcher and Coles, 2004), or as Heron and Chakrabarti (2002b, p.190) found becoming "more conscious of what they may have already known, but were doing instinctively, or had forgotten". Contradictions are apparent in participants' accounts in that they state that their work practices haven't changed but then describe changes. Thus it is likely that increased confidence is due to both affirmation of existing work practices and changes that are not articulated as such due to protection of the social care worker identity.

Feelings of personal autonomy in their workplace are also expressed by participants, such as greater awareness, knowledge and greater confidence in dealing with situations, which they consider due to the educational experience:

My confidence level has risen and I feel better equipped to handle bad situations. I sense the kids feel it too and respond as they know you are in control.

Brenda I.3

Conflict

As Karban and Frost (1998) and Vatcher and Coles (2004) found, education can also result in conflict with the organisation particularly through the questioning of standards. Three participants questioned policies and their implementation in residential care for children.

F: Would you think you are becoming a better social care worker because of your knowledge gained in college?

J: Yes. I'm becoming more, I suppose rights focused where the young person is concerned. That this [standards] is there for them. This is available for them and we need to be following that.

Jean I.4

We should be doing a hell of a lot more for them [young people in care] but we can't. It states that we should be. It is resources and it is red tape as well with the health board. They're tying our hands yet they have written [policies]. It's a whole contradiction. [...] We're not keeping them safe.

Susan I.3

I'm beginning to question the national standards for childcare in so far as the standards themselves are good but they are very vague. They can be interpreted, I reckon, in different ways for arguments sake.

Paul I.3

Frustration with the policies and organisation of residential social care is associated with the limitations on the autonomy of social care workers who work with young people in residential social care settings and their control by state regulations, what Daley (2002) and Hicks *et al.* (1998) refer to as bureaucratic organisation and what Brante (1990) classifies as a social welfare profession, in which the values of the professional group are limited by social welfare legislation.

For example, Paul discusses his frustrations with the legal requirement for recording clients' behaviour, seeing them as "meeting the needs of the unit" rather than the client, and the impossibility of consistent approaches to clients due to different personalities as contributing to a false environment that does not prepare the young person for "the real world" (I.4):

Jean also discusses her frustration with the residential social care system, alluding to the low status of the client group and the view of residential social care as a last resort for these people:

I certainly don't feel that the health service sees us as professionals. They haven't woken up to us as a service. We are still seen as social containers of what the rest of society does not want. [...] They don't end up in residential care. They're thrown from one service to the next.

Jean I.4

However while Jean feels restrained and frustrated by the bureaucratic nature of the profession she works in, a greater sense of personal autonomy as a result of education, is evident in her challenging the system. She says in the fourth interview:

College has made me much more articulate and more politicised in terms of standards. I can just whip them up. Why are we learning about these things when we are not fucking implementing them and I am not going to be accountable or complicit for the health board.

Thus partaking in education impacts on the professional identity of participants through changing work practices, and feelings of increased confidence and autonomy in the workplace. Conversely it makes them more aware of the limitations of the system they are working in, yet equipping them with skills and knowledge that can help them challenge it, perhaps leading to expansive learning (Engeström, 2001).

Conclusion

The social care worker role is interpreted by participants as involving commitment to meeting the needs of and advocating for clients. For residential social care workers creating and sharing the living space of clients, using daily activities as opportunities for reparative intervention and care and relationship building are also present. The central characteristics of care and relationship building and commitment are not seen as being due to education though professional education is seen as increasing confidence which in turn increases type and number of interactions with clients.

In their role of social care workers who have experience but not a recognised professional qualification participants compare themselves to a counter-role of the social care worker who completes the qualifying course prior to working in the area. Their identity as adult students and experienced practitioners is compared positively for reasons of age, experience facilitating learning and knowledge of the work. A second related counter-role of the academic qualified person as opposed to the experienced practical person is created by two participants and is used to justify their identity as 'good' social care workers despite not holding recognised qualifications.

Some resentment is apparent about the mandatory nature of partaking in the educational course and the perceived lack of workplace support but there is no evidence of these factors directly impacting on student or social care worker identities.

The effect of prior experiences and identities as learners affect confidence about specific abilities seen as being required for success in higher education, indicated through participants judging themselves as being better at some modules than others. Initial

expectations of performance in the role of students is judged on the basis of the time lapse since last being in formal education and level previously achieved. Participants who judge their prior experiences of education as being successful are more likely to use this as indicative of a level of ability with resultant concern about maintaining this view, compared to participants who consider their prior educational experiences as negative or cut-short. In opposition to findings reported by Crossan *et al.*, (2003) and Haggis (2004), no prior contact with higher education and negative experiences of formal education were not found to result in hostility, tentative commitment and slow engagement.

Variation is found in the participants' view of the relationship between student and professional identity in regard to how performance as a student reflects on performance as a social care worker. Some participants see both roles as being judged through their performance as a student. Others separate the identities and thus role performance by using a division between practice and academia, which may be a tactic to defend their identity as a 'good' social care practitioner despite not possessing an accredited professional qualification (Illeris, 2003). Other participants see college material as relevant to practice but performance in each role as different.

Discipline and organisation are the most frequent aspects of the student role reported by participants, perhaps reflecting staff and/or societal expectations of adult students, as suggested by Haggis (2002) and Hafford-Letchfield (2007). The impact of the societal view of adulthood and adult identity is also seen through the participants stated reluctance to seek help. Other aspects of the student role frequently mentioned by participants are the use of academic language and understanding and retaining information in concurrence with other literature on adult learners. The least common aspect of the student role directly mentioned is reflection perhaps influenced by the reported lack of facilitation for reflection on practice reported in social care work (Eisikovits and Beker, 2001; Smith, 2005). On the other hand there is evidence that the majority of participants are engaged in some level of reflection from their accounts of changes to their work practices.

Participants report variations among staff with regard to expectations of being treated commensurate with their adult student status. Resistance to being treated as a child is evident, indicating comparison to a counter-role of child learner. Expected behaviour of staff in relation to the role and identity of an adult student focuses mainly on class involvement. Discussion and participation in class is also seen as contributing to learning and understanding, a central aspect of the student role.

Assessment is viewed as central to the measurement of role performance as a student thereby being crucial to student identity. Grades on assessments are seen as a public measure of understanding and learning, which is exacerbated by the relationship of the course to the participants' occupation thereby exposing their performance to a wider audience. Judgements of oneself as able and intelligent are also impacted on by performance in assessment. Good grades increase motivation through increasing self-esteem and self-verification in the student role and affect the salience of the student identity. The diversity among the class group on performance in assessment affects judgements of success through comparison with others. Clear requirements of expectations for assessments appear to reduce anxiety and increase self-responsibility for performance as well as self-efficacy. This is complicated by the professional nature of the course and applied aspect of modules for one participant in particular.

Common characteristics are apparent in both professional and student identities indicating more pervasive and enduring personal attributes that represent stability in how the individual views him/herself. While characteristics are accepted by participants the extent to which they are useful in a professional and college environment vary and appear to be influenced by societal views. However adjustments in the college environment are also observed and discussed by participants indicating some fluidity in identities depending on whether behaviour receives positive feedback (Hoelter, 1986).

The interaction between social care worker and student identity is examined in relation to the participants' perceptions of the nature of the link between theory and practice and their orientation towards learning. Two participants in particular separate the identities by

appealing to a division between the nature of theory and practice. Despite making statements about the necessity of education in supplying and explaining theoretical frameworks in which to locate practice, these participants appear to see little connection or value in theoretical material. They take a strategic approach towards learning. Most participants, who seem to vary between a strategic and meaning approach, see the value of theoretical input to their work practice. Within this group of participants there is also variation with a few taking a more critical approach (Fealy, 1997), using theory reflectively in a more questioning way about the self and practice.

For other participants the identities seem to be interconnected even to the extent where performance in the student role is seen as partially representative of performance in the social care practitioner role.

Education is found to impact on the social care worker identity in various ways. Firstly, increased status of the professional identity is found particularly in relation to interactions with social workers. Secondly work practices and understanding of them are reported to change indicating transformational learning (Billett and Somerville, 2004). This is seen through increased confidence due to both the experience of success in college and knowledge gained. Specific modules studied are reported to result in direct change in work approaches as well as questioning of the social care system and challenging policies and procedures, thereby affecting the personal autonomy and identity of the social care worker. However questioning of policies and their implementation creates conflict and frustration with the social care system and organisations in which the practitioners work, perhaps illuminating the participants' lack of professional autonomy. Thirdly, confidence is also increased through theoretical support and affirmation of existing practices.

In the next chapter conclusions drawn from the findings will be presented and recommendations for educational practice made. An account of changes to my own practice already implemented will also be given.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview of Chapter

The aim of the research was to explore the interpretation of student and social care practitioner roles, as well as development and change in the related identities for the purpose of contributing to professional knowledge in education. In this final chapter the main findings from my study are discussed in relation to the literature and the theoretical framework used, and recommendations for the practice of education for social care workers made, along with changes already personally implemented. Firstly the qualitative methodology utilised is evaluated for its usefulness in researching the topic and participants' views of the benefits of taking part in the research are discussed.

The Research Process

As discussed in *Chapter 5*, using a qualitative approach allowed me insight into how participants constructed their worlds and their identities (McLeod, 2001). I found also that conducting the research made me more conscious about how I constructed my own professional world as an educator, in particular reminding me of differing students' perspectives on the teaching and learning process and how my behaviour as an educator impacts on the formation of a student identity.

The use of multiple interviews not only fitted with the theoretical framework, which assumes change in identity, but also permitted the development of rapport with participants, resulting in both parties becoming more comfortable in questioning and challenging views.

As also reported by Merrill (1999), taking part in the research was stated by some participants to be valuable in assisting their own reflection on their feelings and experiences:

I've really enjoyed the three [interviews]. I'd nearly advise everyone to [do them]. It's a good way to reflect on what's going on for yourself.

Gerard I.3

As well as providing an additional source of support during the first year in college:

To be honest I mean and it's not just 'cos you're sitting there I have got more support off you through even these bits [interviews]. [...] That kind of bit has been second to none, but it's very sporadic and it's few and far between.

Peter I.3

Theoretical Framework for Identity

As previously mentioned, the use of the structural symbolic interactionist view of identity provided a framework through which stability, change and interaction between identities could be explored. In addition it permitted examination of the impact of micro- and macro-social structures (Merrill, 1999) on identities. Social structures consist of the norms and practices within the college environment and the broader socio-cultural contexts.

Social Contexts

The research was conducted in 21st century Ireland, where there has been a steady increase in mature student participation in higher education, driven by Government policy (Department of Education and Science, 1998; 2002; Skilbeck, 2001). Policy documents associate education with the provision of 'life chances' (Dunne, 2002) and economic growth (Share *et al.*, 2007), through the creation of a qualified (Heraty *et al.*, 2002) and skilled workforce. Education, or at least the possession of qualifications, is valued in the macro-social context in which the research was conducted and was apparent in the accounts of most of the participants. Being in college was associated with pride and feelings of increased importance.

Another relevant factor driving the possession of a professional qualification is the status and process of professionalisation of social care work, with authors (e.g. Williams and Lalor, 2000; Heron and Chakrabarti, 2002a) proclaiming that possession of qualifications will increase the professional status of the social care workforce. Social care work has been reported to be devalued by the public and other professionals because of its origins (Gilligan, 1999; Smith, 2003), misunderstanding of the nature of the work (Hicks *et al.*, 1998; Williams and Lalor, 2000), its status in relation to social work (Norton, 1999; Williams and Lalor, 2000) and its association with parenting (Lane, 2001; Smith, 2005).

The most obvious way in which participants are affected by the process of professionalisation of social care is in the need for a qualification, with this being the most commonly cited reason for enrolling in the course. Although some participants expressed initial resentment about mandatory qualifications, all expressed interest in and seeing the value of education as the course progresses, though their level of engagement was mediated by both their identities as a student and a social care worker. Some contradictions were evident in particular with two participants, with both referring to the need for theoretical frameworks to support their work practices but yet not acknowledging that material covered in college played any part. This concurs with the views proposed by Lea and West (1995) and Illeris (2003), who suggest that reasons for participation in adult education can be varied and complex and can change (Blair *et al.*, 1995).

Back in 2000, Williams and Lalor proposed that employers support staff to gain qualifications in social care as a way of increasing the status of the profession and meeting the increasingly complex needs of clients. Still, variation was found between employing agencies in relation to the level of financial and other support provided for students. However no relationship was apparent between judgments of perceived workplace support and level of engagement and orientation towards the course opposing the suggested influence of the workplace on professional learning suggested by Ottoson (2000) and Daley (2002). Indeed one of the participants who did not appear to integrate the two social identities described the support given by her workplace to be excellent.

Social Care Worker Identity

Ibarra (1999) describes the development of professional identity as a process in which the individual tries to develop a correspondence between self and the work setting. In social care work the use of self is considered primary (Smith, 2005; Garfat *et al.*, 2005). Participants directly refer to aspects of personal identity, as well as other social identities and how they affect their work practices and identity as a social care practitioner. Characteristics common among participants' views were those of caring, empathy and being able to build relationships with others. However these were seen as inherent in the person or developed through life experiences rather than being due to education.

Commonality was found among participants regarding the role of the residential social care worker in relation to the centrality of care and relationship, advocacy, provision of a comfortable living environment and using activities as opportunities for reparative intervention, echoing those found in the literature (e.g. Anglin, 1999; Davies-Jones, 2000). One participant, who did not work in residential childcare, however interpreted the role in a way similar to the "advice, guidance and assistance" social work model suggested by Smith (1977 p.277) indicating the blurred boundaries between social work and social care work as noted by Gallagher and O'Toole (1999) and Farrelly and O'Doherty (2005). According to Daley (2000) allegiance to a profession can be encouraged through interaction with fellow professionals which could be provided within the educational setting as it brings together people from different social care areas. The part-time and intensive nature of the course was reported to inhibit interaction with classmates and thus sharing of professional views, particularly in the initial stages. Since this research was conducted the schedule of delivery has been revised to facilitate more interaction between students outside of the classroom. From informal conversations with later cohorts of students this has been found to be beneficial in helping understand different areas of social care work.

While, it was found that participants' evaluation of the usefulness of modules studied are mediated by their judgments of their own abilities as learners, the view of participants not working in residential childcare of the irrelevance of content of some modules for their needs is a factor that educators need to consider. If the course is presented as leading to a

generic social care qualification, the course content and the way this is presented to students needs to ensure inclusiveness for all participants.

Commitment to the work, expressed through dedication (Friedson, 1990), and using a client-centred approach as advocated by Knorth *et al.* (2002) and Hallstedt and Högström (2005a), was also prevalent in participants' occupational identities. Contrary to Lindsay's (2002) finding that commitment to the work is viewed as being part of being a professional one participant questioned the professionalisation of social care as being based on aims of improved status and salaries rather than the primacy of commitment to caring for others.

Whereas the poor public perception of social care work is documented in the literature, participants' accounts indicated that they value the work they do. At the same time frustration with the social care system was evident and became greater as the course progressed, as also found by Karban and Frost (1998) and Vatcher and Coles (2004). One of the acknowledged outcomes of adult education is increased questioning of the status quo (e.g. O'Faithaigh and O'Sullivan, 1997; Merrill, 1999; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003) and this was found through expressions of dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic social care system, particularly residential childcare. Residential childcare was described as "not meeting the needs of the clients"; "social containers for what the rest of society does not want" and a "massively inefficient, expensive and not necessarily effective system". While this could be construed as awareness of the limitations of professional autonomy at group level, conversely greater feelings of personal autonomy are reported due to increased knowledge and confidence, discussed below.

Participation in education is found to impact on feelings of professionalism, particularly in relation to status differences between social care and social work. Participants speak about feeling "more on a par with social workers" and 'being on the same level but providing different services.'

Student Identity

As with the role of the social care practitioner, commonality is found in the interpretation of the student role. Frequently mentioned are expectations of discipline, time management,

understanding and retaining material, similar to that found in the literature (e.g. Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Moore, 2004), and perhaps reflecting the expectations of staff (Merrill, 1999; Hafford-Letchfield, 2007) as well as my being a staff member. Despite the reported importance of reflection in professional education (e.g. Quicke, 2000; Parton, 2003) and in social care practice (Hicks *et al.*, 1998; Smith, 2005), reflection upon course material was less commonly mentioned directly by participants. This could be due to prior views of the purpose of education as the provision of knowledge (Merrill, 1999) and/or the competency model promoted in social care practice (Smith, 2005) or the methods of assessment used. Those participants who saw reflection as part of the student identity also referred to college as a space that allows for reflection, as also found by Vatcher and Coles (2004).

While participants with short prior experiences of education described the prospect of doing the course as “daunting”, prior success in education seems to have a greater effect on anxiety. Those who had a short initial education or negative experiences referred to the differences between the educational settings whereas some of those who had previously experienced educational success used this as a measure with which to judge present success and expressed a fear of failing. Since a mature student group is likely to have a greater range of abilities (Kelly, 2005) and lecturers have expectations that adult students are self-directed and responsible (Merrill, 1999; Hafford-Letchfield, 2007) it is therefore possible that support is focused on assisting and alleviating fears of those students who have had little prior experience of formal education to the neglect of others. The fear of failing was perhaps exacerbated by their performance in college being known in the workplace as participants refer to concerns about the views of colleagues.

Many participants were initially apprehensive about language use, readings and assignments. Lack of confidence and varying levels of anxiety were evident with some participants, but this lessened as the course progressed. This, considered along with, the stated reluctance of all but one participant to seek help, suggests the importance of awareness from educators to be proactive in the provision of support. Rather than general reassurances, clarity in expectations with regard to readings and assignments, as well as the

timely provision of necessary information, was found to encourage self-efficacy. Since the data for this study was collected, I have put in place support for academic writing, in the form of workshops interspersed during the first semester of college, as well as formative assignments. I have also developed a study skills and writing module on the VLE used in the college for the first year student group. Student feedback has been positive.

Participants particularly expressed frustration and insecurity when guidelines and feedback for assessment were not provided clearly, thereby preventing them from performing well in the student role. For the student identity to be salient and the individual to be committed to it (thereby giving time and energy to the role and experiencing intrinsic satisfaction) educators need to ensure that students are enabled in achieving positive evaluation for their performance as students, so producing self-verification of the identity. When the student identity is not verified behaviour can become “paralysed” (Foote, 1951, p.18). A salient identity as a student or learner is particularly significant if professionalism in social care is seen as involving a commitment to continuing education. Additionally Miers *et al.* (2005) suggest that students who feel empowered in college are more likely to transfer empowering practices to their client groups in the workplace. Through informal discussion of these participants’ frustration with lack of clarity in expectations and feedback with my colleagues in the department improvement has been reported by later groups of students. I have also developed standardised marking schemes for some types of assessment which have been adopted by the department.

Another way in which self-efficacy can be achieved is through respect for the individual’s professional views, thus verifying the participants’ occupational identity to some extent and consequently reducing anxiety in challenging workplace practices. As found by Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992) and Johnston and Merrill (2004) the use of discussion and exchange of views during class was reported as maintaining interest, assisting learning and showing respect for the students’ adult and professional status. However as the purpose of professional education is transformative in that the aim is to encourage questioning of and critical reflection on workplace practices within a theoretical context (Bamber and Tett, 2000) the necessity of a safe and supportive environment is paramount to minimise

additional anxiety caused by threatening individuals' occupational identities. This suggests educators need to balance validating workplace experiences while encouraging questioning of these in a theoretical context (Whalley, 1999 cited in Bamber and Tett, 2000) through both teaching and assessment methods. The majority of participants stated that they felt respected and valued by academic staff with regard to their prior workplace knowledge. A preference for the use of discussion in class to enable them to hear the views of their peers was evident for all participants for both learning and maintaining interest in the subject matter.

Interaction between Identities

Johnston and Merrill (2004) suggest a bi-directional relationship between different social identities. While a transactional relationship was found between the social identities of student and social care practitioner in my study, even among this small sample of fifteen participants, variation was found in relation to the level and ways in which the social identities of student and social care practitioner interact.

For some participants the interaction between the two social identities is apparent through relating performance in one role to performance in the other, which appears to create additional anxiety. Participants referred to concerns about performance in college, as measured through grades on assignments, as being evaluations of their ability to perform in the workplace by lecturers, expressing views such as "they'll think I'm crap at my job".

While all participants acknowledged the role of theoretical input in social care work views about the contribution of theory to practice varied. At one pole was the position that innate qualities and practice experience are most relevant to practice and the theoretical input is minimal while at the other was a critical approach (Fealy, 1997), where theory can be used in a reflective capacity to question understanding of the self and practice situation and make changes. Participants who believed in the superiority of practice experiences and workplace policies in informing social care work maintained a strategic approach towards college work (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983) and transformative learning was not apparent. Those who saw theory as a tool that contributes to understanding of practice varied between using

a meaning approach and a strategic one depending on whether they were working towards assignments or not, as found by Sutherland (1995) with nurse tutor students. This suggests that social care educators need to be aware of the differential judgements of the relationship between theory and practice taken by students and if a critical approach is to be encouraged students are provided with time (Eraut, 1994) and assignment types that encourage and facilitate this. For example Nikolou-Walker (2007) found, with police officers in Northern Ireland, that assessment based in work practices facilitated reflection and Heron and Chakrabarti's (2002b) participants felt that writing skills rather than practice was being assessed in written assignments, which could take the focus away from examining practice. I now discuss ways in which theory and practice can be related with students.

Some participants who were found not to be reflective appeared to be protecting their occupational identity by keeping it separate from their student identity. As Bamber and Tett (2000) and Yelder (2004) suggest, examining work practices in professional education can cause anxiety for the individual and result in defence of the identity concerned (Illeris, 2004). These participants emphasised their competence in their work and separated the world of work from that of college through viewing the latter as academic and ideal in opposition to the "real work" of social care (Adams *et al.*, 2006). While these participants referred to needing theory, this was spoken about in a general sense, and the view that work practices are informed by inherent talents and workplace training and experience, not education is maintained. It appears, for these participants that the academic and practical were viewed as irreconcilable. If the purpose of professional education is to enable individuals to deal with ambiguity and change through critical reflection on work practices within theoretical frameworks (Bamber and Tett, 2000; Queeny, 2000) this could be indicative of a greater need for methods of assessment to be designed to fulfil this aim so that successful role performance as a student involves more evidence of reflection on work practices.

As mentioned previously, participants' judgements of the relevance of course material was mediated by their student identity, particularly their judgement of themselves as practical or academic. However, in line with the literature, (Milligan, 2003; Cameron, 2004)

psychology was seen as particularly relevant especially in residential social care work, for example in increasing awareness of the integration of domains and stages of development and the impact of environmental influences on an individuals' development. Knowledge of legislation and protection guidelines was also stated to be of particular relevance to the majority of participants suggesting cognisance of the bureaucratic framework in which social care is located.

Regardless of the view of the theory-practice relationship all participants expressed change in their professional identities, though there was variation in the admitted input of education. Most commonly expressed was greater confidence by the affirmation of work practices due to theoretical validation. Participants also spoke of greater understanding of work practices, indicating awareness of a source of knowledge beyond personal experiences and the workplace (Sargeant, 2000). The transfer of confidence attributed to experiencing success in college was reported. Participants also spoke of applying knowledge gained in specific areas, such as psychology and legislation and legal guidelines, though this also caused conflict in the workplace through questioning, as reported by Vatcher and Cole (2004).

Conclusion

Viewing the aim of professional education as being to deal with ambiguity and change, requiring participants to critically examine their work practices and move beyond the workplace as a source of knowledge, suggest that participating in programmes of professional education requires adjustment to the individual's professional identity. This caused varying levels of anxiety for participants in my study and the defence of their professional identity. As entering higher education itself is associated with disquiet for adult students, educators need to be aware of, and put in place strategies that not only reduce anxiety but also enable the aim of professional education to be met. Anxiety in the college environment is seen to be exacerbated by staff behaviour that reduces the student's self-efficacy and does not permit verification of the student identity such as lack of clarity in guidelines and expectations for assessment and feedback that does not encourage the student to improve. Educators need also be aware of the differential impact of prior student

identities, particularly that is it not necessarily those who have prior little contact with formal education that are most anxious.

My study found that orientation towards course material is due to a combination of factors including the prior student identity, how relevant this identity is seen to be in the present situation as well as the individual's social care worker identity. While there is commonality in the interpretation of the role of the social care worker, the workplace setting does have an impact, suggesting that educators need to examine the design of courses so that the needs of students working in a variety of settings are met.

While few participants included reflection in the interpretation of the student role all participants recounted changes in their professional identity, though not always acknowledging that education contributed to this, indicating perhaps the effect of a competence view of social care practice and the need to develop explicit strategies and structures in both the profession and educational setting to encourage critical reflection. Despite having an assigned practice teacher in the workplace the majority of participants reported that they were not helped in linking theory with practice.

Conducting this research sensitised me, as a practitioner in education, to the concerns and worries of students as well as increasing my understanding of the situations in which students worked. This has led me to make changes in my teaching approach, for example facilitating more application of theoretical material to the workplace through choice of guided readings and discussion both in the classroom and using available electronic means.

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